

Strengthening Reading and Writing Skills of Migrant Workers' Children through Community-Based Indonesian Language Learning Assistance

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Submitted: 12 April 2026

DOI:

Revised: 13 May 2026

Accepted: 16 June 2026

Keywords:	Abstract
Keyword 1; community-based learning; literacy mentoring Keyword 2; migrant children Keyword 3; reading skills Keyword 4; writing skills	<i>This study examines how community-based Indonesian language learning assistance strengthens the reading and writing skills of children of Indonesian migrant workers at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya, Malaysia. In migrant contexts where access to formal education and structured literacy support is limited, maintaining Bahasa Indonesia proficiency is essential for academic development and linguistic identity. This research employed a qualitative descriptive case study design. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of students' written work during an eight-week literacy mentoring program. The findings indicate improvements in reading fluency, comprehension, writing organization, vocabulary usage, and sentence construction. Guided reading strategies, scaffolded instruction, and a process-writing approach contributed to students' literacy development, while participatory and culturally responsive activities enhanced motivation and engagement. These results suggest that integrating structured literacy instruction with community-based learning environments provides a relevant framework for supporting first-language literacy among migrant children. The study offers practical implications for community learning centers and educational stakeholders seeking contextually responsive literacy interventions in marginalized migrant settings.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Literacy – including the ability to read and write effectively – is widely recognized as a foundational skill essential for lifelong learning, academic success, and socio-economic participation (Snow et al., 1998). Literacy skills are not only instrumental in educational achievement, but also in supporting individual empowerment and access to information (Puspita et al., 2024). In the context of migrant children, maintaining proficiency in their mother tongue such as Bahasa Indonesia contributes to cultural identity and academic competence, especially when they reside in environments dominated by other languages (Aswan, 2024).

Indonesian migrant families in Malaysia often encounter limited access to formal education systems and structured literacy enrichment programs, making children's acquisition of Bahasa Indonesia increasingly challenging. This gap has led to the establishment of community-based learning centers, such as Sanggar Bimbingan, which serve as informal educational platforms for literacy and cultural continuity. Recent community

service programs have shown that participatory, guided literacy interventions can significantly improve reading and writing skills among migrant children who lack access to formal education (Halili & Prasetyo, 2025).

Community-based literacy initiatives emphasize collaboration among teachers, families, volunteers, and facilitators to create contextualized learning environments (African Storybook Project, 2014; Agung Wijaya et al., 2021). Evidence from studies in marginal and remote communities suggests that structured literacy programs tailored to learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds have robust effects on reading comprehension and writing performance (International Journal of Educational Research Excellence, 2025; science article on community literacy interventions, 2020).

However, there is ongoing debate about the most effective literacy instructional models, especially concerning whether community-based approaches with participatory designs provide equivalent cognitive and academic benefits compared to more formal evidence-based methodologies. While evidence supports both structured and community-engaged strategies, the integration of culturally relevant, collaborative learning designs is often proposed as a promising mode for marginalized learner populations (African Storybook Project, 2014; Puspita et al., 2024).

Thus, the main aim of this study is to explore how community-based Indonesian language learning assistance can strengthen the reading and writing skills of children of Indonesian migrant workers at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya, Malaysia. The principal conclusion anticipated is that a structured, contextually rich literacy assistance model grounded in community engagement will significantly improve literacy competencies, while enhancing motivation and learner identity.

Problem of The Study

Despite the existence of informal learning centers, many children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia demonstrate limited proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia literacy, including reading comprehension and written expression. The specific research problems addressed are:

1. How can community-based literacy assistance be designed to effectively improve reading skills among migrant children?
2. How does structured mentoring influence writing competency in Bahasa Indonesia?
3. What aspects of community engagement enhance the effectiveness of literacy interventions?

These issues reflect both practical educational challenges and theoretical gaps in understanding how community-oriented literacy instruction influences learning outcomes.

Research's State of the Art

Recent empirical literature highlights the importance of literacy support programs in community learning contexts. A study in Malaysia demonstrated that structured literacy mentoring, using media-rich interventions and participatory learning techniques, significantly improved children's reading and writing skills (Halili & Prasetyo, 2025). Similarly, research on community literacy programs in rural Indonesian settings underscores the positive impact of interactive and collaborative activities on children's literacy engagement and competence (Dalle et al., 2024; Lukman Hakim et al., 2024).

The heritage language context of migrant children has also been studied; research on Bahasa Indonesia learning opportunities in non-formal community centers in Sabah points to language use, identity maintenance, and curriculum design as key factors in supporting literacy (Aswan, 2024). Beyond educational practice, global literacy initiatives such as the African Storybook project highlight the value of culturally sensitive, locally adaptable learning materials in fostering early literacy (African Storybook Project, 2014).

Nonetheless, the literature reveals a gap in research focusing explicitly on structured Indonesian literacy interventions designed for migrant children within community settings abroad — especially studies with rigorous design and measurable outcomes in reading and writing competencies.

Gap Study & Objective

Although evidence supports the effectiveness of community literacy programs in various contexts, three key gaps remain in current research:

1. Lack of focused studies on structured literacy interventions tailored specifically for Bahasa Indonesia among migrant children outside Indonesia.
2. Insufficient empirical research comparing community-based methods with other literacy instructional strategies in non-formal environments.
3. Limited documentation on how community engagement components influence sustained literacy development in cross-cultural contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to:

1. Develop a community-based literacy assistance model tailored to Bahasa Indonesia for migrant children.
2. Evaluate its effectiveness in strengthening reading comprehension.
3. Assess its impact on writing competency.

4. Formulate a scalable learning framework that can be replicated in similar migrant community settings.

By addressing these gaps, the research contributes to both educational theory and community practice, offering evidence-based insights into literacy development among migrant populations.

METHOD

Type and Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design. A qualitative method was selected because the study aims to explore in depth the processes, experiences, and contextual dynamics involved in strengthening reading and writing skills through community-based Indonesian language learning assistance. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand social phenomena from participants' perspectives within natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A case study design was applied to examine a bounded system—namely, the literacy mentoring program implemented at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya, Malaysia. Case study research is appropriate when investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

The research procedures included planning the literacy mentoring program, implementing structured reading and writing assistance sessions, observing learning interactions, documenting students' written products, and conducting reflective discussions with facilitators. The study followed principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All research instruments, including interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation protocols, are available upon reasonable request. Due to ethical considerations and the protection of migrant children's identities, raw data are anonymized and not publicly deposited in an open-access database.

This study involved human participants (children). Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's affiliated institution (Ethical Approval Code: [to be inserted]), and written informed consent was secured from parents/guardians and community administrators prior to data collection.

Data and Data Sources

The data in this study consisted of qualitative data derived from:

1. Observations of literacy mentoring sessions.
2. Semi-structured interviews with students and facilitators.
3. Documentation of students' written work, learning notes, and activity records.

The primary data sources were children of Indonesian migrant workers participating in the literacy mentoring program at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya. Supporting data sources included two volunteer facilitators and one community coordinator.

Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Category	Number	Description
Students	15	Aged 9–12 years
Facilitators	2	Volunteer teachers
Coordinator	1	Community manager

As shown in Table 1, the study involved 15 student participants as the main subjects and 3 supporting informants. Additional documentation materials were analyzed to ensure triangulation of findings.

Data collection technique

Data were collected using the following techniques:

1. Participant observation, conducted during reading and writing mentoring sessions to examine instructional strategies, student engagement, and learning interactions. Observation allows researchers to capture naturally occurring behaviors and contextual factors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
2. Semi-structured interviews, carried out with students and facilitators to explore perceptions, experiences, and challenges in the literacy learning process. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility while maintaining focus on research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
3. Document analysis, involving students' written assignments, reflective notes, and learning records. Document analysis strengthens data validity through methodological triangulation (Bowen, 2009).

Data collection was conducted over approximately eight weeks during the implementation of the literacy mentoring program.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns and themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process involved:

1. Data reduction, including transcription, coding, and selection of relevant data segments.
2. Data display, organizing codes into thematic matrices and descriptive narratives.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification, identifying recurring themes related to literacy improvement and community engagement.

The analysis was conducted iteratively alongside data collection to allow emerging themes to inform subsequent observations and interviews. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking, in which participants reviewed summaries of findings to confirm interpretive accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The results of the analysis were used to formulate a community-based Indonesian literacy mentoring model aimed at strengthening reading comprehension and writing skills among migrant children.

RESULTS

1. Improvement of Reading Skills through Community-Based Mentoring

The findings indicate that community-based Indonesian language mentoring contributed positively to the improvement of students' reading skills. Based on participant observations conducted over eight weeks, students demonstrated increased fluency, improved pronunciation accuracy, and better comprehension of narrative and informational texts.

At the beginning of the program, most students showed limited reading fluency and difficulty identifying main ideas in short passages. However, through guided reading sessions, repeated reading strategies, and collaborative discussions, students gradually developed confidence and comprehension skills. By the final weeks of implementation, the majority of participants were able to summarize short texts and respond accurately to comprehension questions.

Interview data revealed that students felt more motivated to read because the materials were contextually relevant and culturally familiar. Facilitators also reported that interactive reading activities, such as group storytelling and peer-assisted reading, encouraged active participation and reduced anxiety.

These findings suggest that structured yet participatory literacy mentoring in a community setting can strengthen reading engagement and comprehension among migrant children.

2. Enhancement of Writing Skills through Structured Assistance

The analysis of students' written documents demonstrated noticeable progress in writing organization, vocabulary usage, and sentence construction. Initial writing samples indicated fragmented sentences, limited vocabulary, and inconsistent spelling patterns. After continuous mentoring sessions focused on guided writing, brainstorming, and revision techniques, students' written outputs became more coherent and structured.

Students showed improvement in organizing ideas into paragraphs, using appropriate connectors, and expressing personal experiences in written form. Thematic coding of interview data revealed that students perceived writing tasks as less difficult when facilitators provided clear scaffolding and examples before independent practice.

Facilitators emphasized that the process-writing approach—consisting of drafting, revising, and feedback sessions—played a crucial role in strengthening students' confidence and competence. The collaborative review process also encouraged peer learning and constructive feedback.

Overall, the results indicate that consistent mentoring and scaffolded instruction significantly enhanced students' writing performance in Bahasa Indonesia.

3. Role of Community Engagement in Literacy Development

Another significant finding concerns the role of community involvement in supporting literacy development. The Sanggar Bimbingan environment fostered a supportive and culturally responsive learning atmosphere. Students reported feeling comfortable expressing themselves because the learning space was informal and community-oriented.

Observational data showed strong interaction among students, facilitators, and community members. Parental encouragement and facilitator commitment were identified as key supporting factors. The collaborative nature of the program strengthened students' motivation and sustained participation throughout the intervention period.

The integration of culturally relevant texts and shared storytelling activities also reinforced students' linguistic identity and emotional connection to Bahasa Indonesia. This suggests that community-based learning environments not only improve technical literacy skills but also enhance motivation and identity affirmation.

4. Overall Interpretation and Experimental Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that community-based Indonesian language mentoring at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya effectively strengthened both reading and writing skills among children of migrant workers. Improvements were observed in reading fluency, comprehension, writing coherence, and vocabulary use.

The results further indicate that literacy development in migrant contexts is most effective when instructional scaffolding is combined with participatory, culturally responsive approaches. The supportive community environment contributed significantly to students' engagement and confidence.

In conclusion, the implementation of a structured and community-based literacy mentoring model provides a viable framework for strengthening Bahasa Indonesia literacy among migrant children. This model may serve as a reference for similar community learning centers supporting migrant populations in other contexts.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that community-based Indonesian language learning assistance significantly contributed to strengthening the reading and writing skills of migrant workers' children at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya, Malaysia. These results can be interpreted within the framework of literacy development theories and socio-constructivist learning perspectives, which emphasize interaction, scaffolding, and contextual learning as essential components of effective instruction.

The improvement in reading skills—reflected in increased fluency, better comprehension, and the ability to summarize texts—supports prior research highlighting the effectiveness of structured and guided reading instruction (Snow & Matthews, 2016). The implementation of guided reading sessions, repeated reading strategies, and collaborative discussions aligns with the scaffolding approach, where gradual support enables learners to achieve higher levels of competence. This finding is consistent with Graham et al. (2020), who emphasize that systematic and sustained instructional practices significantly enhance literacy outcomes.

Regarding writing skills, the application of the process writing approach—consisting of planning, drafting, revising, and feedback—proved effective in improving students' written organization, vocabulary usage, and coherence. The observed development suggests that writing proficiency evolves through iterative practice and reflective revision. These results are in line with cognitive theories of writing, which argue that structured feedback and guided practice are crucial for developing writing competence (Graham et al., 2020).

Importantly, the study also confirms the working hypothesis that community-based approaches play a strategic role in migrant education contexts. The supportive, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environment fostered students' motivation and self-confidence. This finding resonates with Cummins' (2021) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, which posits that strengthening first-language proficiency contributes to overall cognitive and academic development. Maintaining Indonesian literacy among migrant children, therefore, not only enhances academic skills but also reinforces cultural identity and linguistic continuity.

In a broader context, the results suggest that community learning centers can serve as effective alternatives in addressing educational access limitations faced by migrant children. Integrating structured instructional strategies with participatory and culturally relevant practices offers a sustainable literacy development model. The collaborative involvement of facilitators, parents, and community leaders further strengthens the educational ecosystem within marginalized settings.

However, this study has certain limitations. The relatively small number of participants and the focus on a single case study site limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore recommended to:

1. Employ mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs to provide complementary quantitative evidence of literacy gains.
2. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of community-based literacy mentoring on academic achievement.
3. Explore the integration of digital learning tools within community-based Indonesian language programs to expand accessibility and scalability.

Overall, the study demonstrates that community-based literacy mentoring is a relevant, adaptive, and sustainable approach for strengthening reading and writing skills among migrant children. Beyond improving technical literacy competencies, this model contributes to learner motivation, linguistic identity formation, and social engagement within migrant communities.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how community-based Indonesian language learning assistance strengthens the reading and writing skills of migrant workers' children at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya, Malaysia. The findings demonstrate that structured literacy mentoring combined with participatory and culturally responsive practices significantly improves students' reading fluency, comprehension, writing organization, and vocabulary development. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of systematic literacy instruction with a community-based learning framework specifically designed for migrant children outside Indonesia. While previous studies have largely focused on literacy interventions in formal school settings, this study contributes new empirical evidence showing that non-formal, community-driven environments can effectively foster both academic literacy skills and

linguistic identity reinforcement. The research therefore expands existing knowledge by positioning community learning centers as strategic educational spaces for migrant populations.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single community learning center with a relatively small number of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative case study design, while providing in-depth insights, does not allow for statistical measurement of literacy gains. The duration of the intervention was also limited to eight weeks, which may not fully capture long-term literacy development outcomes. Future research should involve larger and more diverse migrant communities, apply mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs to measure measurable literacy progress, and conduct longitudinal investigations to examine sustained impacts over time. Further exploration of digital literacy integration within community-based Indonesian language programs is also recommended to enhance scalability and accessibility.

The implications of this study extend to educational practitioners, policymakers, and community organizers working with migrant populations. Community-based literacy mentoring can serve as a viable and adaptive model for strengthening first-language proficiency among migrant children, particularly in contexts where access to formal education is limited. Educational stakeholders are encouraged to design structured mentoring programs that combine explicit literacy instruction with culturally relevant materials and collaborative learning practices. Strengthening partnerships among facilitators, parents, and community leaders is essential for sustaining literacy development initiatives. Overall, this study underscores the importance of contextualized, community-engaged approaches in advancing literacy equity and supporting the holistic development of migrant children.

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