Literacy voluntary teaching for low socio-economic early graders in Sumbawa Regency of Indonesia

Iwan Jazadi, Elli Marliana, Dita Rezkia Utami, Aris Dwi Intan Aprianti, Jalaluddin Jalaluddin, Solihin Solihin
English Education Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Sumbawa, Indonesia

Article Info

ABSTRACT

The research reported on a literacy intervention program for 150 early grade learners from low socio-economic background by involving 50 volunteers in 50 different village spots in Sumbawa Regency of Indonesia. The research was emancipatory because it seeks to empower the community to address the local problems of literacy learning loss experienced by the needy early graders. The data were collected through literacy assessment, observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings showed that 90% of the early graders improved their literacy mostly with two and one level progress. Factors contributing to the success were good preparation of volunteers, engaging teaching approaches, relevant materials that suited student levels, and continuous assessment. The last key finding was that the volunteers strongly embodied teaching voluntarism as a soul with six features (affection towards others, action of giving, availability, positive inner feelings, heroism, and divinity). The recommendation from these findings is that multi-stakeholders, including the government, provide support to enhance the program sustainability. This research contributes a model of voluntary teaching for low socio-economic early graders that can be adapted in other locations in Indonesia and overseas.

Corresponding Author:

Iwan Jazadi
English Education Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa
Sumbawa Bima Road, Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara 84316, Indonesia
Email: iwanjazadi@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Student attainment in Indonesia was already low before the COVID-19 took place. Based on program for international student assessment (PISA) report, Indonesia's reading score was ranked 72 out of 77 countries [1]. Many efforts were done to improve this situation. As discussed, those efforts consist of those focusing on reading activities and those on teaching and learning to read at the early grades (the first to the third grades of elementary school).

Interventions through reading activities aim to build literate culture or the habit of reading for students and even the community. For example, the regulation of Indonesian Education and Culture Minister (Permendikbud) number 23/2015 requires schools nationally to apply 15 minutes of daily reading on non-school books prior to commencing their class. It was reported that 5,360 schools have improved the reading literacy of their students [2]. One of these schools was Al Mujahidin Muhammadiyah Middle School in Yogyakarta, Indonesia which successfully developed its students' reading culture through 15 minutes of daily reading, responding activities to the book, and develop reading strategies of all subject books [3]. Many local governments responded to the Minister regulation. For example, the Buru Regency Government of Maluku Province introduced 'Buru reading movement' by building and supporting the availability of digital libraries,

village office libraries and reading rooms, and community-based libraries, all of which have relevant collections. With these facilities, children, students, and adults used their spare time to read books wherever they were. This program was warmly welcomed by the community and fully supported by the village governments [4].

Similarly, Joubert *et al.* [5] reported a school literacy intervention in a rural middle school in South Africa using the school library as a reading site, by repairing the library building and adding more new books, and then inviting and assisting the students to read in the library. After the program, the findings showed that more students visited the library and borrowed more books. Systemic literature surveys by several researchers [6], [7] suggested that many reading interventions have helped learners increase their reading test scores. A study by Akbaşli and Şahin [8] shows that a good reading skill improves learner numeracy and science mastery. However, the reading culture programs as reported above failed to address specific needs of early graders who struggled to learn to read before they could join a reading community of any kind.

Many studies done outside Indonesia have reported interventions in learning to read, especially for early graders from the low socio-economic backgrounds. For example, Bulat *et al.* [9] reported 30 early grade reading and literacy programs in some developing countries and found some factors contributing to the success of such programs, including engaging teaching method, materials relevant to children, continuous assessment, and the use of mother tongue as an alternative medium of instruction. Engaging teaching methods include communication styles that are egalitarian and interpersonal built on being open, empathetic, supportive, positive, and equal [10]. Effective teaching methods are also supported by the use of teaching media such as flash cards and creative or digital applications that increase learner interest [11]. Materials relevant to early grade children include those built on the learners' local cultural resources [12]. Continuous assessment begins from the onset of the program, namely assessing the early grades levels (beginning, letter, word, paragraph, and story), and is followed up by grouping and teaching the participants differently based on the levels [13], [14]. Eisenchlas, Schalley, and Guillemin [15] found that the use of students' first language helps develop their bilingual literacies in both the first and the second language to a high level.

The other factor that contributed to a successful literacy intervention is the involvement of tutors with a strong sense of voluntarism. Voluntarism is a spirit inherent in people who provide and devote their time, money and energy to help others without expecting any return [16], [17]. There are four elements of voluntarism, namely giving, obligation, interest, and thankfulness. Giving is realized through sharing to serve people in need, while obligation is embedded as moral commitment to help others [18]. Interest is the feeling of fondness in a volunteer doing a voluntary work, while thankfulness entails an act of giving back to those in need a little of what God has abundantly given to a volunteer [19]. Although voluntary work constitutes an essential element of one's life, it may only be a free time activity, as it does not affect a person's normal livelihood. However, the situation varies, to some extent depending on the age and types of professional background of those involved in a voluntary work [20]. Although done without hoping any return, literacy voluntary work offers some forms of benefits to the volunteers such as happiness and satisfaction, physical and mental healing, and a means of empowering and preparing a future career [21]–[23].

The COVID-19 has seriously worsened learner attainment, not only nationally but also globally. One of the most serious impacts of the global response to COVID-19 in the field of education is the high increase of school closures worldwide. These school closures have caused millions of children to experience learning loss. UNESCO estimated that by the end of March 2020 about 190 countries or more had shut schools with the intention to reduce the spread of COVID-19 [24]. Governments around the world had decided that learning was done from home using online platforms, broadcasting devices, or blended learning [25], [26]. However, early grade learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and those in remote areas with no or minimum internet access have experienced learning loss [27]. The innovation for Indonesian children program (INOVASI) and Agency for Research and Development and Bookkeeping, Center for Policy Research (Puslitjak Balitbangbuk) [28] found that, after a year of learning from home, Indonesian early graders had experienced literacy-learning loss for five to six months. The students' failing to learn the foundational literacy would multiply negative effects in the future learning of all subjects.

To respond to this situation, the Indonesian Central Government has done many efforts including cooperating with many stakeholders such as sub-national governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies. One such collaboration is the INOVASI program, a partnership between the governments of Australia and Indonesia, focusing on student literacy, numeracy and character education improvement. This program involves Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT), Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), the National Development Planning Ministry (Bappenas) and sub-national partners in the provinces of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), North Kalimantan and East Java. The local partners include local governments, teacher training institutes, and civil society organizations. Having two phases, phase 1 (2016-2020) and phase 2

(2020-2023), the program has such beneficiaries as local facilitators, teachers, principals, supervisors, school partners, early grade students, and literacy volunteers [29].

INOVASI's phase 2 has especially focused on how to cope with the early graders' literacy learning loss by adapting the teaching at the right level (TaRL) approach that was evidently successful in India and some other countries [14]. The teaching approach were piloted by INOVASI collaborating with local teacher training lecturers in 98 rural elementary schools in three regencies of NTB, namely Central Lombok, East Lombok, and Bima Regencies. INOVASI also introduced the teaching approach and materials to some 12 other local teachers training institutes, which then applied the approach in the literacy volunteer activity involving students to compensate for social service or teaching apprenticeship which were their required college subjects. These interventions increased early graders' literacy at least up to one level higher after 8-16 weeks. However, there was a concern about how to sustain the program beyond INOVASI's initiative and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic as the INOVASI program would end in two years.

Thus, this research was a means of transferring initiative and expertise from international agents to local agents who would respond to local needs in a sustainable basis. That is, we as a local research team learnt from INOVASI's team, then independently designed and implemented similar voluntary literacy teaching for early graders in Sumbawa Regency while researching the processes and results of the program. Thus, this paper analyzes the early graders' literacy development, the contributing factors to the development, and the volunteers' perceptions about literacy voluntarism. The research questions were formulated as: i) To what extent does the voluntary teaching improve the early graders' literacy?; ii) What factors contribute to the improvement?; and iii) How do the volunteers embody the volunteering in the early grade literacy teaching?

2. RESEARCH METHOD
2.1. Research design
This research is emancipatory [30], taking two levels of empowerment, a concerned group of individuals (the research team and literacy volunteers) and a needy community members (early graders from low socio-economic background). Such empowerment is not meant to be temporary (project life), but entails sustainability of a community that stands independently in its efforts to serve others [31]. This research can be called participatory action research, whereby 'research' means a scientific effort to produce knowledge from experience, 'action' is what is being researched, and 'participatory' is defined as the involvement of the researcher and the researched in a particular type of activities [32]. The notion of 'participatory' also means inclusivity by involving the researched as partners and collaborators in identifying problems, collecting information, analyzing it, implementing solutions, and promoting social changes [30], [31], [33], [34].

2.2. Research participants
This paper specifically focuses on the literacy teaching volunteering with two groups of stakeholders, namely the literacy volunteers (n=50) and early graders (n=150). To make the literacy teaching more effective, one volunteer taught three learners. This arrangement followed the INOVASI voluntary teaching program. All of these volunteers and early graders were the sources and participants of the study. They were selected through the following procedure. Prior to doing the recruitment of participants, the research proposal had been approved by the university research and community service institute and by the sponsoring agency. One consideration for the approval was the project compliance to ethical issues and strict adherence to the health protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The literacy volunteer recruitment was publicly advertised via social media (Facebook and Instagram) and via the research team individual network (WhatsApp and direct communication). Those who enrolled via our Google Form link (n=70) were interviewed via telephone. The selection criteria were Indonesian citizens residing in Sumbawa Regency West Nusa Tenggara Province, who were at least senior high school graduates, healthy, interested in literacy voluntary teaching, ready to work with children, having no criminal records on violence to children and drug abuse, and some other technical requirements. Parts of these technical requirements were the participants' consent to be mentored and monitored during the program and that the results would be published by maintaining their anonymity and privacy. Those accepted were 37 female (74%) and 13 (26%) male volunteers with ages ranging from 19 to 48 years and such backgrounds as university students (30 or 60%), teachers (17 or 34%), housewives (2 or 4%), and unemployed (1 or 2%). They participated in seven-day training sessions about the literacy assessment and teaching, child protection, voluntarism, growth mindset, and communication strategies before starting the voluntary teaching.

Moreover, the early grade learners (n=150) were identified and recruited by the research team collaborating with the selected volunteers. Each volunteer was assigned to identify and recommend three early graders who might be the family, relatives, or neighbors of the volunteers. Alternatively, the research team members identified and recommended potential early graders and assigned the volunteers who lived not

far from the address of the early graders to be their mentors. In this case, the early graders should meet the criteria that they came from low socio-economic families and that they found difficulties in learning from home. Those 150 participating early graders were 7 to 9 years old and sitting at the first grade (67 or 45%), the second grade (51 or 34%) and the third grade (32 or 21%). Their parents worked with no fixed and lower income as farmers (76 or 51%), daily workers (23 or 15%), self-employed (9 or 6%), fishermen (6 or 4%), builders/carpenters (6 or 4%), private business staff (5 or 3%), and the rest as migrant workers, drivers, motorbike taxi riders and tailor (8 or 5%). Parental consent (and school support for some learners) was also obtained before the teaching commenced. Parts of the parental consent were that the voluntary teaching was monitored and that the results would be published by maintaining the children's anonymity and privacy.

2.3. Data collection and instruments

Data collection techniques for this research include assessment, observation, interviews, and documentation. An assessment was done to measure the literacy levels of the early graders before and after voluntary teaching. As the research used INOVASI's literacy materials as the main materials in literacy teaching, the research also adapted the diagnostic instrument to measure the learners' literacy levels. This literacy teaching materials were developed by following the teaching at the right level approach [14]. That is, learners were assessed, then grouped and taught with materials that suited their literacy competency levels, namely: i) Beginning to know letters; ii) Having known more letters; iii) Able to read familiar words; iv) Able to read words especially familiar ones and short simple sentences; and v) Fluent to read and retell simple stories. Each level has a specific range of reading attainment. For example, the beginning level starts from not recognizing letters at all up to recognizing five letters. The assessment was done by the literacy volunteers who previously attended our seven-day training. For using the assessment instrument, the research team had trained the volunteers to note specific literacy description of the learners, for example, mastering three letters and able to combine letters as syllables but unable to read them as words. The volunteers' understanding of the training materials was good, as indicated by their post-test scores of 75% or above in all the topics trained.

The activity implementation, namely literacy teaching volunteering, lasted three months in 50 village or neighborhood spots in Sumbawa Regency where the early graders resided. One volunteer taught on average three early grade children from low socio-economic background. During the implementation, one member of the research team mentored and monitored a group of ten volunteers, while the first researcher served as the supervisor of the five researchers/mentors. Each mentor maintained communication with their volunteer mentees via a WhatsApp group, provided necessary support on demand, and visited the volunteers in their teaching spots while collecting data via observation, interview, and collected relevant documents (i.e., volunteers' logbooks, photos and videos) in the first and last months. Each mentor-researcher then transcribed their interviews with the volunteers. The data focused on the effectiveness of the literacy teaching, the use of teaching materials and media, and the volunteers' notions of voluntarism.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed thematically, that is, by identifying, grouping, and providing explanations into patterns of meaning or themes found in the dataset, thus allowing the researchers to view and comprehend the overall meanings and experiences in the voluntary literacy teaching. The approaches used were both deductive and inductive. It was deductive because the data were pre-grouped based on the research questions. However, as the researchers read, understood, and organized the interview data especially, the topics talked about not only what was asked, but also many other things that enriched the research findings in general.

Thus, what we did as researchers in the data analysis followed a six-step approach to thematic analysis [35], namely reading the whole transcripts to get to know the data, reading again to identify initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing for potential codes, finalizing and interpreting themes, and writing up. In the process of coding and searching for themes, we relied on qualitative research software NVivo, while the interpretation and writing up were done manually. Regarding the first research question, we relied on qualitative assessment data at the beginning and end of the program. In classifying the learners' levels, we did not simply use classifications by INOVASI, but rather, we used the data trend that might allow reclassifications [36]. For the second and third research questions, we did it fully inductively (data-driven). For identifying volunteers contributing explanations (interview data) that we quoted in this article, we used their initials (first letters of volunteers' names). Some volunteers had only one name and so their initials consisted only one capital, while the others with two or three names had two or three capitals as initials. However, when the number of volunteers contributing is more than five, we simply mentioned the number, rather than all of the initials of the volunteers.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Results
3.1.1. Early graders' literacy improvement

The literacy voluntary teaching began with an initial assessment of the early graders' literacy competency levels. The volunteers not only determined the level groups, but also provided notes about the specific level of each early grader. To capture the data more accurately, we found the need to revise the INOVASI's literacy competency level classification [37], namely by dividing the letter level and the story level each into two levels, and renaming the paragraph level as the sentence level. Thus, there are seven literacy levels in the adapted version used in this research, namely beginning, letter, syllable, word, sentence, paragraph, and story, each with a description as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. INOVASI's version and the current adapted version of early graders' literacy levels

	INOVASI's version			Current adapted version	
	Levels	Description		Levels	Description
1	Beginning	From beginning to learn letters to recognizing fewer than 5 letters	1	Beginning	From beginning to learn letters to recognizing fewer than 5 letters
2	Letter	From recognizing five letters to recognizing all letters, but unable to combine letters and read them as syllables and words	2	Letter	From recognizing five letters to recognizing all letters, but unable to combine letters and read them as syllables
			3	Syllable	Able to combine letters and read them as syllables, but still unable to read them as words
3	Word	Able to read familiar words	4	Word	Able to read familiar words
4	Paragraph	Able to read simple short sentences	5	Sentence	Able to read simple short sentences
5	Story	Able to read a paragraph or a simple story fluently	6	Paragraph	Able to read a paragraph or a simple story fluently, but still unable to retell or show an understanding of the story
			7	Story	Able to read a paragraph or a simple story fluently and able to retell or show an understanding of the story

As shown in Figure 1, two-thirds of the early graders were in beginning (31%) and letter (36%) levels, most of them were first graders (59) and followed by second graders (30). It is worth noting that 11 third graders were still at the beginning and letter levels. The data also suggest that at each competency level, except the story level, there were learners from different classes. Not surprisingly, no learners joining this program had reached the story level, in which they could read, understand, and retell what they read.
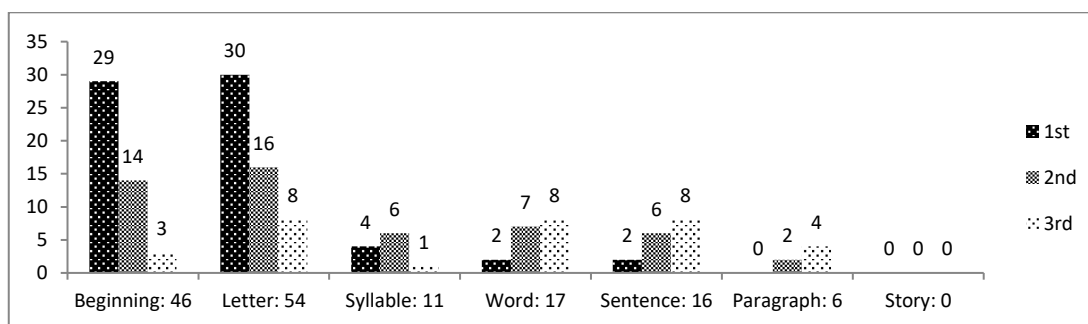

Figure 1. Early graders' literacy levels at entry (N=150)

The voluntary teaching took place for three months, two meetings a week, each meeting lasting 1.5 hours, mainly using INOVASI literacy materials arranged based on three competency level groups. Level group 1 included beginning, letter and syllable levels; level group 2 included word and sentence levels; and level group 3 included paragraph and story levels. As each literacy volunteer taught three learners, he/she taught learners individually in a case the learners belonged to different competency levels.

The results of our monitoring in the third month (weeks 23 and 24) show that 140 (90%) of the early graders improved their literacy mostly with two and one level progress, and the others with more than one level progress, as presented in Figure 2 to Figure 4. As shown in Figure 2, the majority (77 or 51%) of the early graders improved by two literacy competency levels, mostly from beginning to letter and then to syllable level, and letter to syllable and then to word level. It is worth noting that 16 learners from the three grades improved from sentence to paragraph and then to the story level, 10 learners from the second and third grades improved from word to sentence and then to the paragraph level, and two learners from the first and second grades improved from syllable to word and then to sentence level.
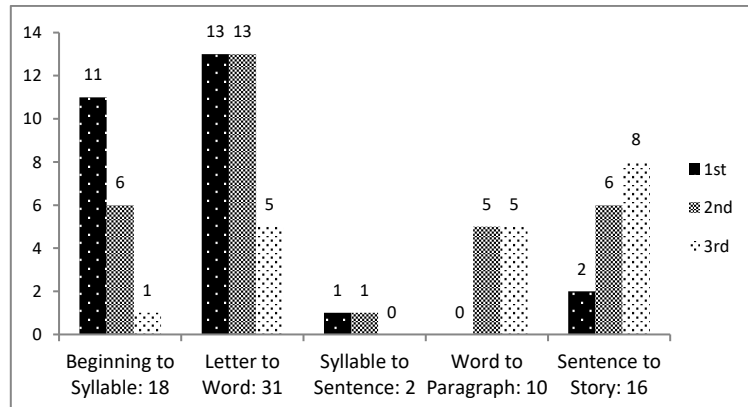
Figure 2. Early graders with two literacy level improvement (N=77/150)

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3, 25% (38) of the 150 early graders improved their literacy competency by one level, namely beginning to letter (15), letter to syllable (7), syllable to word (9), and word to sentence levels (7). Thus, the percentage of this one-level advancement distributed across learners from the three early grades, except the letter to syllable level improvement with seven learners only from the first grade. Moreover, as shown in Figure 4, 13 first graders improved their literacy by three level, namely from letter to sentence level, while one third grader remarkably improved by five level, from letter to the highest level (the story level).
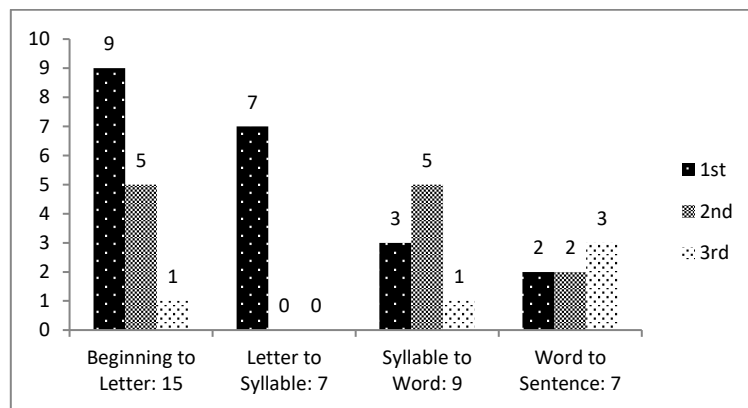
Figure 3. Early graders with one literacy level improvement (N=38/150)
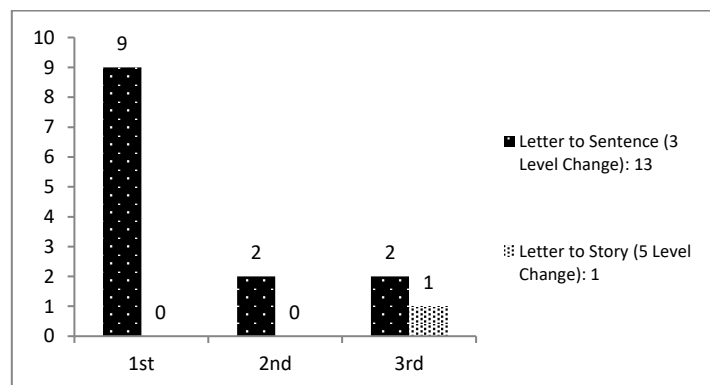
Figure 4. Early graders with more than two literacy level improvement (N=14/150)

On the other hand, as shown in Figure 5, 10% or 15 early graders experienced very slight improvement that resulted in their level not changing. There were 13 learners, not only from the first grade but also from the second and third grades, began from a total non-recognition of letters and ended in the state of recognizing or reading up to five letters (still in the same level). The other two learners improved within the letter level, namely from mastering about half of the letters to most or even all of the letters, but were still unable to combine them as syllables.
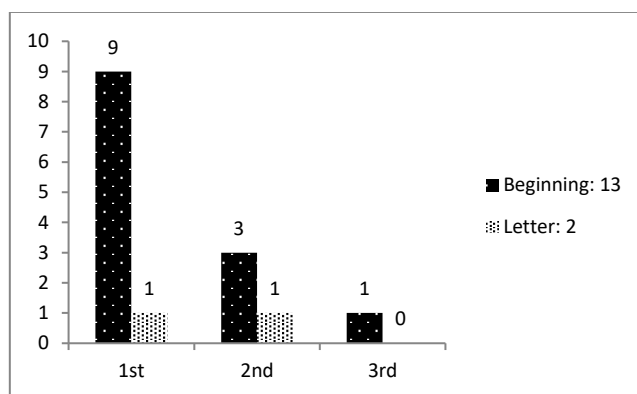
Figure 5. Early graders with no competency level improvement (N=15/150)

To sum up, the early graders' literacy competency levels at exit or the last two weeks of the program are presented in Figure 6 and the comparison of their competency at entry and exit is presented in Figure 7. As shown in Figure 6, more learners (40 or 27%) were in the word level, 25 or 17% in the syllable level, 23 or 15% in the story level, 17 or 11% in the letter level, 13 or 9% in the beginning level, and 10 or 7% in the paragraph level. Learners from all grades occupied all levels, except the paragraph level that was occupied by the second and graders. It is worth noting that there was one learner of the third grade in each of the three lower levels. On the other hand, 12 first graders reached the sentence level and even two reached the top story level.
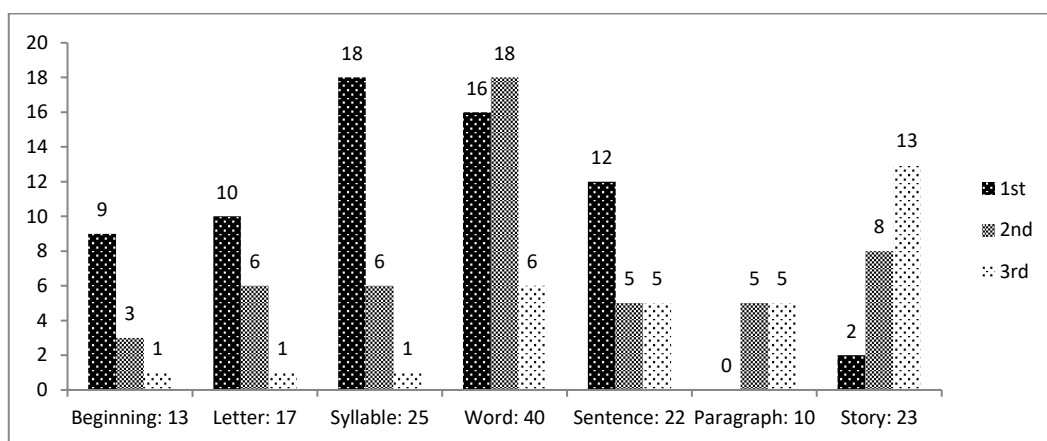

Figure 6. Early graders' literacy levels at exit/3rd month (N=150)

As shown in Figure 7, the number of the beginning learners starkly dropped from 46 to 17 (31% to 11%), while the number of those in the story increased from 0 to 23 (15%). In the other competency levels, the trend shows a steady increase, except the word level that shows more than a double increase. Thus, as previously found, 90% of the early graders improved their competency levels. This means that the voluntary literacy teaching was quite successful.
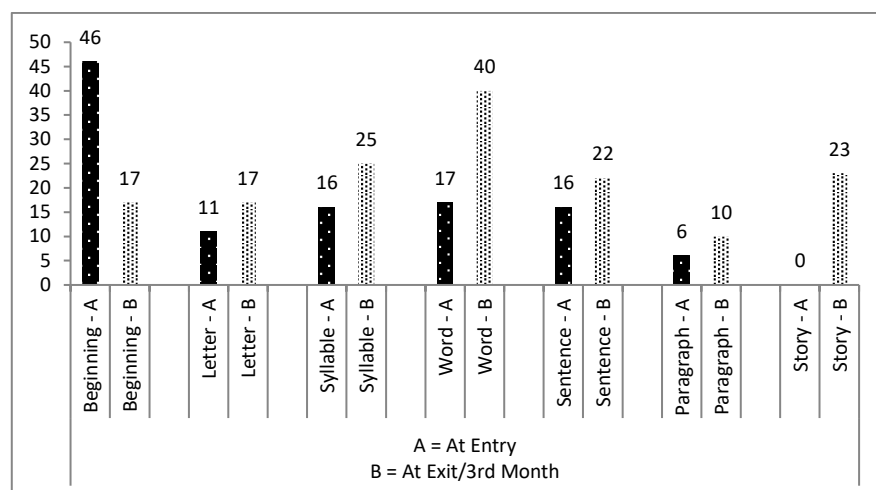
Figure 7. Early graders' literacy competency levels (N=150)

3.1.2. Contributing factors to the early graders' literacy improvement

First, at least eight volunteers indicated that the learners often felt bored or lost interest in learning and they had to find the way out. Volunteers J, FH, and Y engaged the learners with games, such as guessing games, to build a personal bond during initial meeting or after some serious learning. BHS intentionally brought with him some candies every time he taught and shared them to the children usually once for one meeting especially when the kids felt bored. Some other volunteers varied the teaching arrangement from one where the learners listened to the teacher to one where the students worked together and he just observed (MD). TM applied singing to help her students at beginning and letter levels to memorize and read all the 28 letters. TH varied the location of learning, by asking to learn in the yard when they looked bored in the room. ID and RM made another effort, by talking individually outside the lesson time to each learner to know their character and needs, so that they could teach them better. In some locations that had more volunteering activities, the volunteers worked together by swapping learners who moved to the next level so that they could maximize their teaching by only having learners of the same levels or level groups (I, E, M, N).

Second, some students were absent in class. To overcome this problem, volunteers SA, J and N always picked up their students in their houses, talked to their parents, and asked their help to make sure their children's presence in class. Other eight volunteers (AA, ASA, C, VNR, WRR, BHS, EH, and TM) acknowledged that that parents' role was very crucial. Once they realized that their children had progress, they would motivate them to join the lesson. Moreover, after hearing about the benefit of the program, some village figures and officials indicated that the village government would support for all early graders in the village to learn to read (BHS).

Third, 42 out of 50 volunteers acknowledged that the main teaching materials, namely the materials developed by INOVASI consisting of three level groups (beginning and letter, word and sentence/paragraph, and story) to be useful and supporting. A typical comment by AA suggested that there were things to be improved in the module. Some volunteers (FH, RM, M, and J) commented that some pictures in the module were not clear so that the learners could not guess them when not helped by the volunteers. They also found some stories in the module had letters that were too small so that students could not read them well. Some other volunteers commented on letter introduction. Not all letters were introduced before being applied in words, such as letters "v", "x", "y", and "z"; this made learners difficult to write words such "AYAM" in the exercise (N). The introduction of consonants (i.e., L, M, N, R, S, T, and W) in one lesson was considered too much for beginning learners and so a volunteer (FH) suggested that they were separated into two lessons.

Therefore, 14 volunteers enriched their teaching using extra materials and media, generally from the internet. For example, EH and DP used a smartphone-based application called MARBEL in the internet, that provide letter and word games equipped with interesting sounds and visuals. LM found some videos in YouTube to supplement the teaching sources. One volunteer (K) borrowed storybooks from school libraries and used them in her teaching. Moreover, to ensure their students having competency improvement, some volunteers (J, VNR, MS, F, and W) indicated that they had to be flexible in teaching, not by fully relying on the normal target set during the voluntary training. The flexibility allowed them to address their learners' speed, for example by doing more repetitions of materials and exercises until they reached the target mastery. This explains why 90% of the early graders had improved their literacy competency by one level.

Finally, apart from the success, some volunteers explained about some early graders (15 or 10%, see Figure 5) who did not improve their literacy competency. Many of these beginning students did not have kindergarten or early childhood education, did not recognize letters al all at the beginning of the program, and rarely attended the voluntary teaching sessions (AS, MS). The volunteers (N, ID) indicated that two learners had a kind of learning difficulties. One was very difficult to communicate to and had a very soft voice, while the other always confused the letters he learnt along the program. The explanation about this learning difficulty might also be related to the language of instruction that was different from the language used by the students daily. Volunteers BSH and EK reported that they often had to switch to using Sumbawanese (the learners' mother tongue) in teaching because the students did not seem to follow explanation in Indonesian. Therefore, they suggested that there should be supplementary materials (module and cards) in the mother tongue to facilitate the children's learning.

3.1.3. The volunteers' embodiment of teaching voluntarism

There are two big themes emerging from the interviews with the volunteers in responding to the research questions: "How have you embodied volunteerism in your practice or mindset? How are you feeling about doing this volunteering activity?" One is about how they defined their voluntary teaching and the other is about the benefit of serving as volunteers. The volunteers' conceptualizations of voluntarism are summarized in Figure 8.

As shown in Figure 8, the volunteers embodied the literacy teaching voluntarism as a "soul", which is a spiritual part constituting a particular quality in a human being. A typical comment came from a volunteer named TH who stated that "*The voluntary activities I have been involved so far have formed the soul of voluntarism that strongly lives in me*." The comment suggests that to have a soul of voluntarism is through a process. TH acknowledged that at the beginning of joining the program, she just wanted to try herself, but she also wondered how someone would spend some time for something unpaid. As she went on, she reached the end of the monitored program and found herself with a new soul of voluntarism living. Some 42 volunteers explained their conceptions of voluntarism as affection towards others, availability, action, feeling, heroism, and divinity. These can be called attributes of voluntarism. Two or three of these attributes are generally found in each of the volunteers' comments.
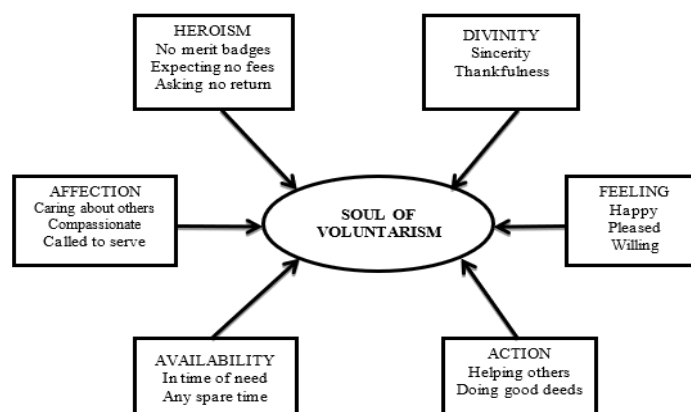

Figure 8. Volunteers' conceptualizations of teaching voluntarism

The first is affection driven by conditions in the surroundings or community, especially the fact that many kids from low socio-economic backgrounds in the critical early years of schooling suffered learning loss due to the pandemic. They described the kids as "those really in need". They were concerned and had to care for the kids. They also felt that the conditions called them to provide solutions. Second, in terms of availability, the volunteers saw voluntarism in two ways. The first is something needed anytime depending on the situation. When there is a situation needing help out there, a volunteer should be available for it. The second is availability in terms of a volunteer's spare time. That is, a volunteer took initiative by sparing some time in her/his hectic life to create activities to help others in need. Thus, these two availability concepts are complementary to each other.

The third and fourth attributes are action and feeling. Doing good deeds, being useful, giving, serving, and sharing are words featuring all the volunteers commenting their involvement in the literacy teaching. While doing the good deeds, the volunteers felt a high degree of happiness, pleasure, and

willingness to continue doing so. Their self-worth, confidence, and enthusiasm also grow while doing the voluntary work. For volunteers whose background was students, besides feeling useful, they found the voluntary teaching as great experiences that added to their curriculum vitae in searching for a future career.

The fifth attribute is heroism. A hero is appreciated for having courage, great achievements, or excellent qualities. A hero is not necessarily given a physically seen placard or merit badge because a true badge is located in her/his heart. The volunteers saw their role as heroes with no merit badge, as great people who expected no material return or asked no service fees. Seventeen volunteers whose background was teachers believed that their profession as teachers was co-constructed by the spirit of voluntarism. Therefore, they believed that teachers deserved the entitlement of heroes without merit badges.

Finally, divine attributes perfect all the other attributes. Some volunteers mentioned that they joined the teaching "sincerely", which means asking no return from human beings because the return came from God Almighty in the form of happiness, pleasure, self-worth, life spirit, useful knowledge, and the willingness to continue to give. Then, the voluntary work made them "thankful to God Almighty" because God had gifted them who were just ordinary creatures with a capacity to help others.

3.2. Discussion

As shown in the findings, the voluntary literacy teaching involving 50 volunteers and 150 early graders was successful. This is indicated by the early graders' literacy competency improvement by 90% and the instilling of voluntarism spirit in the volunteers. These findings have confirmed preliminary studies.

First, affirmative literacy intervention for early graders from low socio-economic families in this research was needed and proven quite successful, confirming the research by previous researchers [5], [38]. Some factors have contributed to the success of the program. The volunteers had engaged the students using some teaching approaches, such as using game or playing and singing, using teaching media such as flash cards and digital applications, following what activities the learners preferred, doing many repetitions, using empathetic language, and talking to the learners personally outside class. These approaches had sustained learner motivation and participation in learning and are in line with several researches [10], [11], [39].

The teaching materials used in the program were relevant with the learners' local situations. For example, animals, fruit, and vegetable made in flashcards and stories in the module all reflected the local contexts of Indonesia, including Sumbawa Regency. Thus, these relevant materials were very useful and confirm a previous finding by Christ and Wang [12].The teaching program was organized based on the result of initial assessment that allowed the choice of materials that suited the learner's levels and formative assessment through which learner progress in each meeting was noted. This is in line with the teaching at the right level approach that has proven successful in many parts of the world [14]. However, this research has found that the classification of learner literacy competency into five levels is not sufficient to explain the research findings and so an adapted classification into seven levels is necessary in explaining the data.

Finally, some volunteers occasionally used the students' mother tongue to facilitate their learning. However, as there had not been enough preparation about using the first language as a medium of instruction and no learning materials and media in the local language were available, some learners whose daily language of interaction was not Indonesian had not fully benefited from the program. This confirms the research by Eisenchlas, Schalley, and Guillemin [15] that the use of students' mother tongue improves their literacies in the first and the second language to a high level.

Second, 50 volunteers' embodiment of teaching voluntarism also confirms previous studies. In this research, the volunteers embodied voluntarism as a soul with six characteristics. The notion of voluntarism as soul is in line with previous study [16] that conceive voluntarism as a spirit attached in a human being. Some characteristics of voluntarism found in this research, namely externally driven affection towards others and action of giving support the research by McAllum [18] that voluntarism denotes an obligation or moral commitment to help others and giving by sharing and serving other people in need.

The divine attribute of sincerity experienced by the volunteers supports the notion of sincerity from an Islamic perspective discussed in Arifin [17] and thankfulness that goes back to God Almighty are in line with a previous study by Akhtar, Pertiwi, and Mashuri [19]. The feelings of happiness and willingness to keep on sharing with others support a previous study by Gage and Thapa [21]. That the volunteers in this research acknowledged their increase of self-worth and confidence strengthens the research by Cho, Wong, and Chiu [22]. Volunteers whose background was students benefited from the volunteering by having new knowledge and experience that were useful in their searching for future career is in line with previous studies [21], [23]. To sum up, the findings in this research add to the body of knowledge in the field of early literacy teaching and voluntarism. Yet, it is noted that the adapted classification of learner literacy competency into seven levels (beginning, letter, syllable, word, sentence, paragraph, and story) is a novelty that may guide future research.

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings show that the literacy teaching successfully improved early grade literacy up to one level or more. Features of successful teaching, namely engaging teaching methods, relevant materials, and continuous assessment, were observed in the teaching program. In addition, through the literacy teaching, we have found an adaptation of competency levels of early grade literacy, namely beginning, letter, syllable, word, sentence, paragraph, and story. Moreover, the teaching volunteers have embodied the spirit of voluntarism, namely affection to the needy, availability, action, positive inner feelings, heroism, and divinity. All these features of voluntarism lay a strong foundation for the creation of a volunteer community of literacy teaching, which is a community that sustains to serve the children in need beyond the monitored project.

Some recommendations for improvement and future similar programs are offered. One pitfall that may need better preparation for teaching early grade children is about the use of mother tongue as an alternative language of instruction and supplementary teaching materials for learners who have not fully socialized in the national language. This situation may be found in many Indonesian villages whose population has one language background. In addition, this article does not discuss detailed strategies on the part of the volunteer community management about how to sustain the voluntary activities. At this stage, we aim to prove how useful the literacy program is and that volunteers are ready to join. Therefore, it is expected that support for this program will continue to be given by multi-stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, higher education and schools, and internal donors.

REFERENCES

[1]　Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Country Note - PISA 2018 Results," 2019, [Online]. Available: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_IDN.pdf (Accessed: Dec. 20, 2020).

[2]　L. Solihin, B. Utama, I. Pratiwi and Novirina, The index of reading literacy activities in 34 provinces, Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (in Indonesian), 2019. [Online]. Available: https://repositori.kemdikbud.go.id/13033/1/Puslitjakdikbud_Indeks%20Aktivitas%20Literasi%20Membaca%2034%20Provinsi.

[3]　Z. Nuryana, A. Suroyo, I. Nurcahyati, F. Setiawan, and A. Rahman, "Literation movement for leading schools: Best practice and leadership power," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 227–233, Mar. 2020, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v9i1.20279.

[4]　M. C. B. Umanailo and A. Nursyifa, "Reading movement in community: A study of Gerakan Buru Membaca," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 475–481, Jun. 2022, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v11i2.20523.

[5]　I. Joubert, L. Ebersöhn, R. Ferreira, L. du Plessis, and M. Moen, "Establishing a Reading Culture in a Rural Secondary School: A Literacy Intervention with Teachers," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 399–412, Jun. 2014, doi: 10.1177/0021909613487676.

[6]　J. Dietrichson, M. Bøg, T. Filges, and A. M. Klint Jørgensen, "Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 243–282, Jan. 2017, doi: 10.3102/0034654316687036.

[7]　S. Fikrat-Wevers, R. van Steensel, and L. Arends, "Effects of Family Literacy Programs on the Emergent Literacy Skills of Children From Low-SES Families: A Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 91, no. 4, pp. 577–613, Mar. 2021, doi: 10.3102/0034654321998075.

[8]　S. Akbaşli and M. Şahin, "The Effect of Reading Comprehension on the Performance in Science and Mathematics," *Journal of Education and Practice,* vol. 7, no. 16, pp. 108–121, 2016.

[9]　J. Bulat *et al.*, "What Works in Early Grade Literacy Instruction," RTI Press. Knowledge and Practice in International Development No. 1, RTI Press Occasional Paper No. OP-0039-1702, 2017. doi: 10.3768/rtipress.2017.op.0039.1702.

[10]　K. Aldrup, B. Carstensen, and U. Klusmann, "Is Empathy the Key to Effective Teaching? A Systematic Review of Its Association with Teacher-Student Interactions and Student Outcomes," *Educational Psychology Review*, vol. 34, pp. 1177–1216, 2022. doi: 10.1007/s10648-021-09649-y.

[11]　A. Hidayatullah, "Assistance for Fun Mathematics Volunteers (Rhematics) for Students at Schools and Children of Fishermen on the Kenjeran Beach, Surabaya," (in Indonesian), *AKSIOLOGIYA: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, vol. 2, no. 1, Jan. 2018, doi: 10.30651/aks.v2i1.1240.

[12]　T. Christ and X. C. Wang, "Negotiation of 'how to' at the cross-section of cultural capital and habitus: Young children's procedural practices in a student-led literacy group," *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 177–211, Aug. 2008, doi: 10.1177/1468798408091854.

[13]　I. S. Magableh and A. Abdullah, "Differentiated instruction effectiveness on the secondary stage students' reading comprehension proficiency level in Jordan," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 459–466, Mar. 2022, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v11i1.21971.

[14]　S. Beery, "Teaching at the Right Level," Pratham Education Foundation. Evidence in Practice, 2018. [Online]. Available: https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campuspress.yale.edu/dist/4/2450/files/2018/04/EvidenceInPractice_CaseStudy_TaRL-1mshy9c.pdf

[15]　S. A. Eisenchlas, A. C. Schalley, and D. Guillemin, "The importance of literacy in the home language: The view from Australia," *SAGE Open*, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 215824401350727, Jan. 2013, doi: 10.1177/2158244013507270.

[16] J. D. Putri and S. A. Mardhiyah, "The Role of Religiosity Towards Altruism on Volunteers of Walhi Sumsel," (in Indonesian), *Insight: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Psikologi*, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 185, Oct. 2018, doi: 10.32528/ins.v14i2.1392.

[17] M. Arifin, "Educational thoughts of As Sa'di (died 1956 AD) about educators' sincerity," (In Indonesian), *Faktor Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 135–140, 2020, doi: 10.30998/fjik.v7i2.6508.

[18] K. McAllum, "Meanings of Organizational Volunteering: Diverse Volunteer Pathways," *Management Communication Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 84–110, Jan. 2014, doi: 10.1177/0893318913517237.

[19] H. Akhtar, R. E. Pertiwi, and M. F. Mashuri, "Exploring volunteer motivation: A perspective of indigenous psychology," (in Indonesian), *Jurnal Psikologi Sosial*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 1–12, 2021, doi: 10.7454/jps.2021.23.

[20] E. van Ingen and J. Wilson, "I Volunteer, Therefore I am? Factors Affecting Volunteer Role Identity," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 29–46, Jul. 2017, doi: 10.1177/0899764016659765.

[21] R. L. Gage and B. Thapa, "Volunteer Motivations and Constraints Among College Students: Analysis of the Volunteer Function Inventory and Leisure Constraints Models," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 405–430, Jun. 2012, doi: 10.1177/0899764011406738.

[22] H. Cho, Z. Wong, and W. Chiu, "The Effect of Volunteer Management on Intention to Continue Volunteering: A Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction of Volunteers," *SAGE Open*, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 2020, doi: 10.1177/2158244020920588.

[23] J. S. Piatak, "Time Is on My Side: A Framework to Examine When Unemployed Individuals Volunteer," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 6, pp. 1169–1190, Jul. 2016, doi: 10.1177/0899764016628295.

[24] M. C. A. Conto, S. Akseer, T. Dreesen, A. Kamei, S. Mizunoya, and A. Rigole, "COVID-19: Effects of school closures on foundational skills and promising practices for monitoring and mitigating learning loss," Innocenti Working Papers, no. 2020-13, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/COVID-19.

[25] G. Gunawan, N. M. Y. Suranti, and F. Fathoroni, "Variations of Models and Learning Platforms for Prospective Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic Period," *Indonesian Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 61–70, Apr. 2020, [Online]. Available: https://journal.publication-center.com/index.php/ijte/article/view/95.

[26] A. Bozkurt and R. C. Sharma, "Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to Corona Virus pandemic," *Asian Journal of Distance Education,* vol. 15, no. 1, pp. i-vi, 2020. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.3778083.

[27] A. N. Hasudungan, Ofianto, and T. Z. Ningsih, "Learning Loss: A Real Threat in Education for Underprivileged Students and Remote Regions during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *International Journal of Distance Education and E-Learning (IJDEEL),* vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 12-23, 2021. doi: 10.36261/ijdeel.v7i1.2223.

[28] Ministry of Education and Culture Republic Indonesia and Australian Government, "Learning recovery: Time for action," Policy Brief - August 2021, Dec. 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.inovasi.or.id/en/publikasi/learning-recovery-time-for-action.

[29] Ministry of Education and Culture Republic Indonesia and Australian Government, "INOVASI phase I achievements and analysis: What works to improve learning outcomes in Indonesian schools?" Activity Completion Report 2016-2020, Jun. 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/inovasi-phase-i-2016-2020-completion-report-june-2020.pdf

[30] I. Jazadi, "Understanding and Reflection of Issues in Language Education Research," *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 41–64, Mar. 2015, doi: 10.15408/ijee.v1i1.1194.

[31] R. Setty and M. A. Witenstein, "Chapter 1 Defining PAR to Refine PAR: Theorizing Participatory Action Research in South Asian Educational Contexts," in *Participatory Action Research and Educational Development*, Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 13–47. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-48905-6_2.

[32] L. Potvin, S. L. Bisset, and L. Walz, "Participatory Action Research: Theoretical Perspectives on the Challenges of Researching Action," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014, pp. 433–453. doi: 10.4135/9781446268247.n23.

[33] K. Mordock and M. E. Krasny, "Participatory Action Research: A Theoretical and Practical Framework for EE," *The Journal of Environmental Education*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 15–20, Jan. 2001, doi: 10.1080/00958960109599140.

[34] H. Kidwai, R. Iyengar, M. A. Witenstein, E. J. Byker, and R. Setty, *Participatory Action Research and Educational Development*. Springer International Publishing, 2017. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-48905-6.

[35] H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, and K. J. Sher, *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological.* American Psychological Association, 2012. doi: 10.1037/13620-000.

[36] G. Juanjuan and N. M. Yusoff, "A review of teachers' assessment literacy proficiency measures," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 1143–1153, Sep. 2022, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v11i3.22300.

[37] INOVASI, "Literacy Volunteers: Material Handout," (in Indonesian), INOVASI NTB, 2020, [Online]. Available: https://drive.google.com/file/d/12mlXCdiVrwvOIM4jLOQMdOg81y2eljnk/view?usp=sharing.

[38] M. Derby, A. Macfarlane, and G. Gillon, "Early literacy and child wellbeing: Exploring the efficacy of a home-based literacy intervention on children's foundational literacy skills," *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 254–278, Sep. 2022, doi: 10.1177/1468798420955222.

[39] T. P. N. Dong and T. N. Van, "The correlation between learning styles and self–directed learning of fifth graders," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 1989–1994, 2022, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v11i4.22680.

BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Iwan Jazadi 🆔 🔍 SC ⟳ is an associate professor at STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. He earned Ph.D. in Education from the University of South Australia in 2003. His teaching and research interests include curriculum and materials development, English language teaching, and language and literacy education. He can be reached at iwanjazadi@gmail.com.

Elli Marliana 🆔 is a lecturer in English Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. She earned MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Adelaide in 2018. Her teaching and research interests are applied linguistics, English language teaching, and language and literacy education. She can be contacted at ellilzh1981@gmail.com.

Dita Rezkia Utami 🆔 is a lecturer in English Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. She obtained Master of Development Practice from the University of Queensland in 2019. Her teaching and research interests are community development, cross-cultural understanding, educational technologies, and language and literacy education. Her email address is ditarezu@gmail.com.

Aris Dwi Intan Aprianti 🆔 is a lecturer in English Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. She received Master of Applied Linguistics (TESOL) from the Macquarie University in 2020. Her teaching and research interests are English language teaching, learning strategies, applied linguistics, and language and literacy education. She can be contacted at arisdwiintana@gmail.com.

Jalaluddin 🆔 is a lecturer in English Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. He earned Master in TESOL from Monash University in 2019. His teaching and research interests are English language teaching, curriculum development, digital technology for learning, and language and literacy education. His email address is jalaluddinak@gmail.com.

Solihin 🆔 is a lecturer in English Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa, Indonesia. He obtained Master in TESL from Flinders University in 2019. His teaching and research interests are English language teaching and language and literacy education. He can be contacted at solihin.mohe@gmail.com.