

EMPOWERING RURAL PRIMARY LEARNERS THROUGH CURATED DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

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Abstract

Access to digital literacy and lifelong learning continues to present significant challenges for learners in rural communities. This study explores the efforts of the Pekik Nyaring Village Library in Bengkulu Tengah Regency, Indonesia, in supporting primary school students through the development of digital collections that are adapted to the local educational context. Guided by the framework provided by the Digital Curation Centre, the research examines how digital learning materials are selected, organized, and delivered to meet the specific needs of young learners in a rural environment. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with a village librarian, a primary school teacher, and a parent. These interviews aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the digital materials are used and to identify the barriers encountered during implementation. Early findings suggest that the presence of relevant and age-appropriate content, along with encouragement from the local school community, helps foster reading interest and strengthen digital literacy among students. However, challenges remain, particularly in relation to limited infrastructure and low levels of digital awareness among parents. The results of this study highlight the important role that village libraries can play in enhancing digital learning and promoting inclusive and sustainable education within rural communities.

Keywords: Digital literacy; lifelong learning; village library; rural education; digital curation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information and communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped educational systems around the world (Agnelli Faggioli, 2020; Anshori, 2018). Conventional learning models have gradually shifted toward more open, adaptive, and technology-based approaches (Huzoree & Soupramanien, 2024). In this digital era, digital literacy has emerged as a critical skill that goes beyond the mere ability to operate digital devices. It encompasses the capacity to think critically, evaluate sources, and use information ethically and responsibly through various digital platforms (Alom & R, 2024; Kloss-Brandstätter et al., 2021). At the same time, the importance of lifelong learning continues to grow as individuals are required to continuously adapt to the evolving demands of society, the economy, and technological development (Divjak et al., 2004).

Despite significant progress in digital innovation, access remains unequal. Many communities, especially in rural areas, still face persistent limitations that hinder their participation in this transformation (Chikwe et al., 2024). In countries like Indonesia, digital infrastructure in rural regions is often inadequate, with limited access to digital devices and low levels of digital literacy among teachers and parents (Memon & Memon, 2024; Sheila & Fahmi, 2024; Xu, 2024). These conditions contribute to structural barriers that obstruct inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of digital curation in ensuring that educational resources are relevant, accessible, and responsive to users' needs (Yusrizal & Anggraeni, 2024). The model proposed by the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) offers a structured approach involving the selection, management, preservation, and dissemination of digital content (Higgins, 2008). Although

originally designed for academic and formal institutions, the DCC model also holds promise for community-based learning spaces, including village libraries (Heidorn & Bryan, 2011).

However, much of the current literature continues to focus on formal education settings such as schools and universities, leaving a gap in understanding how digital curation practices can be applied in local community contexts, especially in village libraries (Ahmad & Rafiq, 2023; Hari et al., 2023; Kunda & Anderson-Wilk, 2011). In fact, village libraries hold strategic potential due to their geographical and social proximity to the community (Erliyana, 2021). They are often more flexible in management and can adjust their collections and services to suit the specific needs of local populations, including primary school students who represent a critical stage in both literacy and technological development (Kharima et al., 2024).

This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the case of Pering Cemerlang Village Library in Pekik Nyaring Village, Bengkulu Tengah Regency. The library has initiated a community-based program to provide curated digital collections specifically designed for primary school children. This initiative stands out not only because it operates within the resource constraints of a rural setting but also because it involves active collaboration with local actors such as librarians, teachers, and parents. Understanding how digital curation is carried out in this context, how content is utilized by its users, and what factors support or hinder its success will provide valuable insights. By examining the link between digital curation and digital literacy in a rural village setting, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education through technology and community empowerment.

Research Questions

Based on the background outlined above, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

How is digital curation practiced in the Pering Cemerlang Village Library in Pekik Nyaring?

How do primary school students in the village setting engage with and utilize the curated digital collections?

What challenges and opportunities emerge in the use of digital curation to support digital literacy and lifelong learning in the context of a village library?

These questions are formulated to guide the research systematically and to serve as the foundation for the study's objectives and contributions..

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

Describe in detail the digital curation process carried out at the Pering Cemerlang Village Library in Pekik Nyaring, including the selection and dissemination of digital content to primary school students.

Analyze how students interact with and utilize the curated digital collections in their learning activities.

Identify the key obstacles and opportunities in implementing digital curation within a village library setting as a strategy to strengthen digital literacy and promote sustainable learning practices.

Significance of the Study

This study offers contributions across three interrelated dimensions. Theoretically, it enriches academic discourse on digital curation practices within non-formal educational settings in rural areas, particularly for primary school-aged children. By focusing on lived experiences within a village library, the study provides a perspective that remains underexplored in existing literature, especially concerning digital literacy in communities with limited access to technology. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for village library managers, educators, and local communities in designing digital curation programs that are relevant and responsive to the social and educational needs of their context. Emphasis on local adaptation is expected to foster more meaningful and effective use of digital technologies. At the policy level, this research offers recommendations for stakeholders at both regional and national levels to strengthen community-based digital literacy ecosystems. The findings also contribute to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 10 on reducing inequality, including equitable and inclusive access to digital learning resources.

Scope and Limitations

This research focuses on a single case study: the Pering Cemerlang Village Library in Pekik Nyaring Village, Bengkulu Tengah Regency. The study specifically examines digital curation practices for primary school students and does not include quantitative measurement of students' academic outcomes. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study aims to understand the processes, perceptions, and challenges involved in implementing digital curation in a rural context..

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Curation in Educational Contexts

Digital curation is understood as a continuous process that involves selecting, managing, preserving, and disseminating digital materials so that they remain accessible and useful for users. Beyond technical concerns such as archiving and storage, digital curation emphasizes the importance of tailoring content to meet the specific needs of users within particular contexts (Dobрева & Duff, 2015). In the field of education, digital curation plays a crucial role in ensuring that online learning materials are not only high in quality but also relevant and appropriate for the cognitive level, age, and socio-cultural background of students (Grácio & Madio, 2022).

One of the most widely recognized frameworks for digital curation is the lifecycle model developed by the Digital Curation Centre (DCC). According to (Higgins, 2008), the model outlines a series of stages in the curation process, including data creation, ingest, quality evaluation, long-term preservation, access provision, and reuse. This structure offers clear guidance for maintaining the relevance and usability of digital learning resources. In the context of primary education, the DCC model is particularly useful because it helps ensure that curated materials are well-organized, accessible, and closely aligned with curriculum goals and the everyday learning experiences of young students (Yakel et al., 2011).

However, implementing digital curation in rural areas demands context-sensitive strategies. Infrastructure limitations, low levels of digital literacy among teachers and parents, and a general scarcity of human resources pose significant challenges to the process. These local constraints mean that content selection cannot rely solely on academic merit; instead, it must be shaped by a deeper understanding of learners' everyday realities and their surrounding learning environment (Sheila & Fahmi, 2024). In rural primary schools, for instance, materials must be appropriate not only in terms of content but also in terms of access and usability.

This makes the active involvement of librarians, teachers, and parents particularly vital. Their collaboration ensures that digital learning materials are not only informative but also accessible, meaningful, and engaging for students. When curation efforts are rooted in local knowledge and community participation, the resulting digital resources are more likely to support sustained and inclusive learning practices in under-resourced settings (Hu et al., 2023).

Digital Literacy in Rural Areas

Digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to access, comprehend, evaluate, and effectively use digital information (Alom & R, 2024; Fajri et al., 2024). (Tamaro et al., 2019) emphasize that digital literacy is not limited to technical skills but also encompasses cognitive and social dimensions that are deeply interconnected. In the context of primary education, digital literacy plays a critical role in supporting children's ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and develop self-directed learning skills in a digital environment.

However, achieving digital literacy in rural areas remains a persistent challenge, shaped by both structural and social barriers. Limited internet access, a shortage of adequate digital devices, and the low level of digital competence among teachers and parents are among the primary obstacles that hinder children's engagement with digital learning tools (Moreira et al., 2024). Additionally, the lack of age-appropriate and culturally relevant digital content presents a further barrier to integrating technology meaningfully into rural children's learning experiences (Inayah et al., 2024).

In this context, digital curation emerges as a strategic response to bridge the gap between children's learning needs and the availability of digital materials (Tamaro et al., 2019). Curation allows for the development of content that is contextually relevant, linguistically accessible, and aligned with both the local cultural setting and the formal school curriculum. When implemented with a localized approach,

digital curation can enhance children's engagement in digital learning activities, stimulate their interest in reading, and foster the development of foundational digital literacy skills from an early age.

The Role of Village Libraries in Promoting Literacy and Digital Access

Village libraries serve as community-based institutions that play a crucial role in providing access to information, knowledge, and literacy for local residents (Kharima et al., 2024). In recent years, their role has evolved from merely offering conventional reading materials to functioning as adaptive learning spaces responsive to technological advancements (Widayanto, 2020). According to (Atmi et al., 2022), community libraries such as those in rural villages possess significant potential to promote digital literacy, especially in areas underserved by formal educational institutions.

In Indonesia, efforts to enhance the functions of village libraries have been supported through the Social Inclusion-Based Library Transformation Program, an initiative launched by the National Library (Fansuri & Batubara, 2024). This program encourages village libraries to move beyond traditional reading services and to become responsive spaces for information access and community learning (Widayanto, 2020). One key aspect of this transformation involves providing digital content that is relevant, accessible, and suitable for diverse age groups, including young children (Maghfiroh et al., 2023)

Nonetheless, the capacity of village libraries to undergo digital transformation varies greatly. Persistent challenges such as limited funding, inadequate librarian training, and low levels of digital literacy within the community continue to hinder progress (Siyamsih, 2024). Consequently, the active involvement of village heads, educators, and parents becomes critical in sustaining digital literacy programs within rural libraries (Setiawan et al., 2024). Collective support from the local community can help reinforce the library's function as a technology-enabled learning hub.

The case study of the Pekik Nyaring Village Library demonstrates that with appropriate initiatives and cross-sector collaboration, village libraries can successfully provide curated digital collections tailored to the needs of primary school students. This initiative exemplifies how, even with limited resources, rural libraries can serve as a vital bridge connecting technology, education, and community to foster inclusive digital literacy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to explore in depth the practice of digital collection curation at the Pering Cemerlang Village Library in Pekik Nyaring Village. The qualitative approach is deemed appropriate as it allows for the exploration of meaning, experiences, and social dynamics that shape the digital curation process within a rural community context (Wiraguna et al., 2024). A case study design was selected to enable the researcher to examine the phenomenon contextually and comprehensively, as well as to observe the interactions among actors involved. This choice is guided by (Yin, 2018), who emphasizes the importance of understanding phenomena within complex real-life settings.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at the Pering Cemerlang Village Library located in Bengkulu Tengah Regency. This site was purposively selected because the library represents a local initiative that provides curated digital collections for primary school children in a rural setting. The participants consisted of four key individuals directly involved in library activities: one librarian responsible for managing the digital collection, one teacher actively assisting students in using digital content, one parent engaged in supporting learning at home, and the village head as a policymaker supporting the development of the village library. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement and relevant experiences aligned with the research focus (Bell et al., 2022)

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility to probe deeper into each participant's experiences (Eppich et al., 2019). The interviews aimed to capture insights on the digital curation process, perceived challenges, and the benefits of digital collections for children's learning. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted direct observations of library activities and user interactions with digital materials. Supporting documents such as collection inventories, activity reports, and library policies were also analyzed to enrich the findings. All data were

systematically collected and documented in the form of interview transcripts, field notes, and archival materials (Wiraguna et al., 2024).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach following the framework developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process began with a thorough re-reading of all interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Initial codes were then generated to identify meaningful units relevant to the research objectives. These codes were subsequently organized into overarching themes that reflected recurring patterns and significant issues found in the data. The emerging themes were carefully reviewed to ensure consistency and coherence across categories, before being refined, named, and elaborated through narrative explanation. To enhance the validity of the findings, the study employed source triangulation and participant validation (member checking), ensuring that the interpretations accurately represented the participants' perspectives.

Research Ethics

All stages of this research were carried out in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative inquiry (Ciuk & Latusek, 2018). The researcher provided each participant with a transparent explanation of the study's purpose, benefits, and procedures, and obtained their informed consent prior to participation. Participant confidentiality was maintained by using initials and withholding any sensitive personal information. Interviews were conducted voluntarily, without coercion, and the researcher ensured that no harm or negative consequences would result for the individuals or the broader community involved. The study was grounded in the principles of responsibility and social sensitivity, which served as the foundation for its ethical conduct.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

General Overview of the Research Site

This study was conducted at the Pering Cemerlang Library in Pekik Nyaring Village, located in Bengkulu Tengah Regency, Bengkulu Province. The library is part of a literacy initiative launched by the village government to support the education of primary school children (Gunaidi et al., 2024). Its strategic location near the local elementary school facilitates easy access for children to use the available resources. In addition to traditional reading spaces, the library is equipped with digital facilities such as computers, laptops, and internet access. These resources were provided through a collaboration with the Bachelor's Program in Library and Information Science at the University of Bengkulu (Valentino et al., 2023).

Digital Curation Practices by Library Staff

Findings from the interviews indicate that the digital curation process at this village library is context-sensitive and tailored to the learning needs of primary school students. The curated digital materials are primarily derived from textbooks aligned with the most recent national curriculum. One librarian explained:

"We select books that are actually used by the school children... such as textbooks from the 2023 Merdeka Curriculum, organized by grade level." (Librarian).

The selection and compilation of content are managed independently by the librarian, occasionally with assistance from university students conducting community service programs. This process is further supported by external collaborations, notably with local higher education institutions:

"The digital collection is not solely funded by the village budget. We submitted a collaboration proposal... and are mentored by the University of Bengkulu." (Librarian)

Accessibility of Digital Collections by Users

The curated digital collections can be accessed both through devices provided by the library and remotely, provided that users have internet access. However, in practice, access remains limited and tends to occur primarily during scheduled literacy awareness sessions.

"The children have accessed it before, but only during digital literacy outreach sessions." (Teacher)

“We can access it from anywhere.” (Parent)

At school, Chromebooks serve as the primary tool for students to explore the digital materials. Nevertheless, not all students are yet accustomed to using these devices independently.

Impact of Digital Collection Utilization

The use of contextually curated digital collections has had a positive influence on students’ reading interest and independent learning skills.

“There is a positive impact... an increase in reading interest... students learn more deeply.” (Teacher)

“The benefit is that they can read from anywhere.” (Parent)

“We can monitor what our children are accessing on their phones.” (Parent)

These findings suggest that digitizing collections not only expands access to learning materials but also encourages greater parental involvement in supporting children's education at home.

Challenges in Implementing Digital Curation

Despite its clear benefits, the implementation of digital curation in the village faces several challenges. One of the main issues is the limited human resource capacity, both among librarians and the user community.

“Currently, the human resources are still unfamiliar with digital collections.” (Librarian)

“When they used it for the first time, they might struggle and need guidance.” (Teacher)

In addition to human resource limitations, technical barriers such as inconsistent internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices also hinder the optimal use of digital collections.

Support from Village Government and the Community

The support provided by the village government is a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of the library program. The village head has demonstrated commitment by supplying infrastructure and fostering strategic partnerships.

“We built the library near the school... we have provided the necessary facilities... laptops, computers, and Wi-Fi.” (Village Head)

Community and teacher involvement, while not yet fully optimized, plays an important role in reinforcing the presence and function of the library.

“Teachers help promote the library’s existence.” (Teacher)

“The village community strongly supports the presence of the village library.” (Village Head)

Although the curation process has not yet fully involved all community elements, the existing social support serves as a vital foundation for building an inclusive and sustainable digital literacy ecosystem.

Discussion

Contextual Digital Curation as an Inclusive Literacy Approach

The findings indicate that digital curation practices at the Pekik Nyaring Village Library are implemented in a contextual and responsive manner, specifically tailored to support the literacy development of elementary school students. The librarian selects digital materials by referring to the Merdeka curriculum, ensuring that the content aligns with the students’ developmental level and learning needs. This approach reflects the digital curation lifecycle proposed by the Digital Curation Centre (DCC), which emphasizes the processes of selection, management, and sustainable access to relevant digital content (Higgins, 2008).

These findings reinforce the view that village libraries can serve as strategic spaces to promote inclusive digital literacy. Despite limitations in technological infrastructure, content curation that takes into account age, language, and familiarity with children’s everyday experiences has proven to enhance student engagement in learning.

Community and Village Government Support in Strengthening the Curation Ecosystem

Community participation, particularly from teachers and parents, plays a vital role in supporting the success of digital curation. Collaboration between the librarian and teachers has led to the development of interactive literacy activities that align with students' learning styles. Although parental involvement remains limited, it shows promising potential in supporting children's use of digital collections at home.

The role of the village head is also notable. In addition to providing devices and internet access, the village head has actively facilitated collaboration with higher education institutions, thereby enhancing the technical and institutional capacity of the library. These findings support the argument that successful digital curation in rural settings requires consistent policy support and cross-sectoral collaboration (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Challenges in Implementing Digital Curation

Despite these positive developments, several challenges remain in the implementation of digital curation. Limited digital literacy among librarians and community members is one of the primary obstacles. Moreover, inadequate technological infrastructure and low levels of public participation in the selection and evaluation of digital content hinder the optimal use of curated resources.

These findings align with (Pasqui, 2024), who argues that the success of digital curation is heavily dependent on the readiness of human resources and the strength of the surrounding technological ecosystem. To address these issues, ongoing training is essential, along with the establishment of feedback systems that allow community members to actively contribute to the planning and development of digital content..

Research Implications

The findings of this study yield several important implications. Theoretically, they contribute to the growing body of literature on digital curation in rural contexts, particularly within community-based, non-formal education environments. From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for village library managers and other local stakeholders in designing digital literacy programs that are contextually relevant and responsive to local needs (Munisa et al., 2024). From a policy standpoint, the results highlight the importance of integrating digital curation into village development planning, especially as a strategy to promote inclusive literacy and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals—namely SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) (Shafira et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the digital curation practices implemented at the Pering Cemerlang Library in Pekik Nyaring Village play a vital role in enhancing digital literacy among primary school students. The curation process is contextually grounded, taking into account the relevance of content to the curriculum and the learning needs of young learners. Close collaboration between librarians and teachers serves as a foundation for producing and delivering digital materials that are both accessible and engaging for children. The findings indicate that, despite limitations in infrastructure, a village library can function effectively as a hub for information access and educational support.

The active role of the village government further supports the success of this program by providing essential facilities such as digital devices and internet access. Community involvement—particularly by teachers and parents—has contributed to sustaining the use of curated digital materials. However, the study also highlights the need to improve digital literacy skills among parents and some educators. Challenges such as limited access to digital devices and inconsistent connectivity require long-term, strategic solutions.

Recomendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that village library managers enhance librarians' technical competencies through continuous training and create inclusive mechanisms that allow broader community participation in the digital curation process. The village government should institutionalize

digital curation services as part of the local development agenda, including through partnerships with educational institutions and relevant private sector actors. Additionally, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of such initiatives on improving digital literacy and cultivating a reading culture in rural communities.

In summary, this study offers a compelling example of how community-based digital curation can serve as an alternative model for bridging digital literacy gaps and promoting more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable educational access in rural areas.

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