

## Community-Based Critical Literacy Practices: A Reflective Study of Literacy Implementation in School

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**Abstract.** *This article examines critical literacy practices carried out by the informal education community thoughtfully and potentially so that they can be applied to developing the school literacy movement program. Statistically, 95.66% of Indonesia's population can read, but on the other hand, the reading literacy score in the PISA study is still below average. So far, there have been different perspectives regarding literacy as a reading activity and literacy as an activity to process information. These differences result in different interpretations and attitudes in processing information in a text. Critical literacy relates reading analysis skills to the realities faced by students. This study aimed to find patterns of critical literacy carried out by the Ngampar Boekoe community and Jamaah Majyah Al Manbal about the inherent development of the school literacy movement program. The research method used is qualitative with an auto-ethnographic approach. The data comes from the researcher's personal experience, observation, in-depth interviews and artefacts. Data analysis uses triangulation with a bottom-up pattern to find critical literacy formulas and can be reflected in the school literacy movement program. The results found are in the form of alternative formulations which consist of critical material that can develop students' critical power, dialectical methods filled with a sense of trust, and quality-based evaluation using response journal instruments and written works. The results of this study can be used as policy-making considerations for relevant stakeholders to build the qualifications of a literate society.*

**Keywords:** *Auto-Ethnography, Critical Literacy, Informal Education Community, Literate Society, School Literacy Movement*

### INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a new domain in academic studies, especially its relevance to education and culture. Literacy was initially assumed to be the practice of reading and writing. This assumption was gradually normalized to the practice of literacy alone. The Prague Declaration of 2003 reformulated that literacy also includes societal communication patterns (UNESCO, 2003). The declaration also concluded that literacy is closely related to basic skills in processing and understanding information through practice and cognitive attributes to overcome various problems (Oktariani & Ekadiansyah, 2020; Wiedarti et al., 2016). Furthermore, literacy is a core component that every individual must possess to formulate sources of knowledge in various forms and then use them as practical tools to solve personal and social problems.

In this big human resource development project, Indonesia has responded by becoming a member of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) to prepare human resources to have appropriate competencies within the framework of international needs. In order to achieve this goal, the OECD routinely established a three-year study called PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which was initiated to collect data on the prerequisites for human development, especially in the field of education. The assessment subjects used are reading literacy, mathematics, and science. In practice, PISA uses an autonomous analytical framework without a direct connection to the type of curriculum applied to learning. However,

through its report, PISA suggests evaluative changes to the national curriculum that is the reference for learning (OECD, 2019). So, until now, PISA has become a benchmark in terms of human resource development targets for developing countries.

In the last 15 years since Indonesia joined the OECD, reflective educational practices in Indonesia have remained relatively the same in developing literacy skills (Pratiwi, 2019). In the context of efforts to improve the PISA report card, the government has issued a literacy improvement design, especially those that touch on the practical realm of the curriculum, such as changes in the role of teachers as learning facilitators, learning materials that are adaptive to the surrounding environment, questions that target higher order thinking skills (HOTS), and the cultivation of habits through the School Literacy Movement (SLM). For the latter, the government only finalized its grand design in 2016.

Various findings on this habituation are only dominated by increasing aspects of interest and motivation to read (Dharma, 2020; Rohman, 2017; Salma & Mudzanatun, 2019; Subakti et al., 2021; Utami et al., 2021; Widodo, 2020). However, as has been stated, the basic concept of SLM does not only target the growth of interest in reading but also the ability to identify, determine, find, evaluate, create effectively and organize, use and communicate information to overcome various problems (Wiedarti et al., 2016). The last phrase in the quote is the end or final achievement of the literacy process.

The references in this view are two contradictory statistics. The Central Bureau of Statistics released data on illiteracy in 2018 as 4.34% of the total population aged 15 years (BPS, 2018). This contradicts the PISA results, which show that in the same year, the reading literacy level was at an average of 371 out of an international average score of 500 (OECD, 2019). Other data according to UNESCO, Indonesia's reading interest index is only around 0.001, categorised as very low (Nurhayati & Musa, 2020).

The conclusion from the two contradictory data points leads to the different ways of viewing literacy as a reading practice and an information analysis practice. The different views result in different follow-up practices from the interpretation of reading. However, both literacy practices have the main prerequisite to processing information in terms of language. Language plays a key role in literacy practices because it is a metacognitive tool to assemble readers' knowledge to provide advanced understanding to readers (Marconi, 2020; OECD, 2019). This vital position is then juxtaposed with language's exclusivity as a linguistic science. However, the inclusiveness of language as a formal aspect in dissecting social contexts is also needed to develop literacy in a more analytical direction and support practical policies in the context of human resource development (Sakhiyya, 2015).

Critical literacy can be a "bridge" between these two conceptions of literacy. Critical literacy critiques educational patterns by placing text/reading as an effective tool to gain awareness to change personal and social situations. The key to this critical literacy practice is metacognitive awareness, which leads to the practice of liberation from the shackles of reality. This idea was developed based on Paulo Freire's idea in the concepts of awareness, problem-facing education, and alphabetization (Fadli, 2020).

This idea has contributed to education in terms of building critical thinking skills (Ferdyan & Arsih, 2021; Intan et al., 2021; Oktariani & Ekadiansyah, 2020; Widiatmoko & Endarto, 2021; Rahman & Atjalau, 2019; Suhirman, 2020). However, the critical literacy practices in these studies only view literacy coherently in its relevance to the subject under study. In other words, this research tries to find more inherent patterns concerning critical literacy practices as the design of the SLM. This research will examine promising practices in socio-cultural realities that are linear with critical literacy that can have implications for developing SLM in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach that examines the interrelationship between various community-based good practices in critical literacy and then examines their relevance and implications for the School Literacy Movement (SLM) policy. Data in this research was obtained through literature study, grand observatory, and in-depth interviews with research subjects over a span of 5 years. The sample used was a non-formal community that organized countercultural education activities. The social situation studied is a program that applies critical literacy as a sample reduction qualification.

The research analysis aims to deduce domains of findings that can be applied to the SLM program. The analyses will use an auto-ethnographic approach where the researcher's experiences of intersections with non-formal communities are presented using a bottom-up pattern to provide a reflective study between grassroots social situations and literacy policy in general. This approach was chosen because it represents the researcher's direct experience of the event in detail and owns the data. However, to maintain the validity of the data, the principle of objectivity, such as data collection, writing field data, and enacting data validly through the concept of triangulation (Shakka, 2019). Some of the data in this study is a collection of experiential artefacts through direct observation of field data to provide reflective implications for the SLM which the researcher in the field also experienced.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Ngampar Boekoe and Youth Community Practices**

Ngampar Boekoe is a literacy movement born out of the idea that reading is a cultural activity that can be transmitted through reading in public spaces. In 2015, the researcher and several others started the Ngampar Boekoe movement in the city park of Cimahi, West Java. The time was chosen on a Sunday morning when the local community gathered at the park for various activities. Ngampar Boekoe participated by organizing a reading stall.

Initially, researchers faced various obstacles to transmitting the idea of reading in public spaces, such as the availability of a place that was still considered illegal at that time because it did not have a permit. Also, the availability of books at that time still needed to be improved because it was dominated by books donated by members only. However, slowly, along with consistency and the principle of the usefulness of public space, all these problems can be overcome. Until now, four similar movements have networked in other places, namely Haur Geulis, Bogor, Pataruman and Cimahi.

Based on research results (Putra & Suherman, 2019) there are several reader segmentations, namely parents, adults, teenagers, and children. However, the largest percentage experienced directly by researchers is children. Children like light books like comics, chick-lit, teenlit, and light novels. Adults are likelier to read general psychology books, recipes, novels and romances.



**Figure 1. Artefacts of Ngampar Boekoe Activity**

To encourage people's interest in reading, researchers through Ngampar Boekoe always organize incidental activities once a month. For example, *karinding* music performances, photo exhibitions in open galleries, performance art to raise awareness of the forest fires in Riau a few years ago, and regular discussions entitled *Tadarus Buku*. This last activity will be the main focus of this research.

*Tadarus buku* is an activity of reading a book using the *tadarus* method (like reading the Qur'an). The participants take turns reading one sentence in the book, then try to give views, comments, or provide additional information on the sentence. The books read were, for example, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Aku Ini Binatang Jalang*, poems anthology by Chairil Anwar, *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi* by Ir. Soekarno, and finally, the *Buru Island tetralogy* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

Since the textbooks that had to be read were short enough, the researcher easily codified the sentence and understood its meaning. Then the researcher also easily relates it to experiences, feelings, or other references that can be used to strengthen the sentence. This decodification process is important to internalize the value gained based on personal experience. The researcher then shared the knowledge in the meeting room to collectively share knowledge and feelings. The exercise was carried out by additional participants one at a time until every participant had contributed their opinions, remarks, sentiments, and ideas in one read sentence. The meeting concludes with a prediction for the following reading or a brief commentary that will be uploaded and read at the following gathering. Many members also put their reflections into written works from their own scientific perspectives. Each *tadarus buku* takes quite a long time. It depends on the presence of members at that time, the content of the book, and the intensity of the *tadarus buku* meeting. The researcher had felt bored, but the dialectic of each meeting was warm and interesting, making the researcher more consistent in implementing the practice of *tadarus buku*. In addition, the results of the book study are usually documented through writing in the form of articles, essays, or short comments that are reflections of members of the reading at that time.

### ***Tadabbur* Maiyah Al Manhal in Achieving the Three Dimensions of Literacy**

The beginning of contact with Jamaah Maiyah Al-Manhal in Malang was when a friend invited to attend a Qur'anic study with the theme *Tadabbur*. At that time, the researcher met the Al-Manhal congregation led by Ahmad Fuad Effendy, often called Cak Fuad, a Muslim scholar who is a lecturer at the State University of Malang and a member of the Umama Council of King Abdul Aziz International Centre Of Arabic Language. The researcher at that time was immediately invited to reflect on the content of the Qur'an through the *tadabbur* method. At that time, the congregation read the text "Self Knowledge and Self Purpose" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 286).

The Qur'an is intended as a guide for all mankind. However, according to Muhammad Ainun Nadjib, one of the key figures in Jamaah Maiyah, many factors keep people away from the Qur'an. So, this *tadabbur* method is an active response from Cak Nun and Cak Fuad to ground the value of the content in the Qur'an so that everyone can interpret it. The *tadabbur* method emphasises the approach to the importance of the Qur'ān in order to touch the human heart, inviting it always to reflect, and the expected output is the development of character, motivation always to do good, and transformation towards goodness (Effendy & Najib, 2021).

*Tadabbur* linguistically stems from the plural form of *adbara*, which means the end or back. Terminologically, *tadabbur* Al-Qur'an means contemplating a verse whose general meaning is already understood to be used as a lesson for himself. *Tadabbur* also means understanding the main message of a verse and then connecting it with what has been and will be done to interpret the verse (Effendy & Najib, 2021). A reading method that focuses on seeing and contemplating the consequences and end of something, where the assumption is that the Qur'an was revealed to me as a human being in a free and useful way to increase knowledge and good character (Romatika, 2022).

The researcher and the congregation were given an introduction based on QS Al-Baqarah: 286. The introduction contains the reason for the revelation of the verse, the interpretation to understand the verse, and the linguistic rules in the scriptural text. Then, in turn, the congregation provided context with personal experiences, which were then shared by the text. At that time, the researcher felt the power of listening to others by sharing meaningful life experiences. From there, the researcher was also able to reflect on the function of the verse and then try to predict the steps that must be taken to achieve the purpose of the verse.

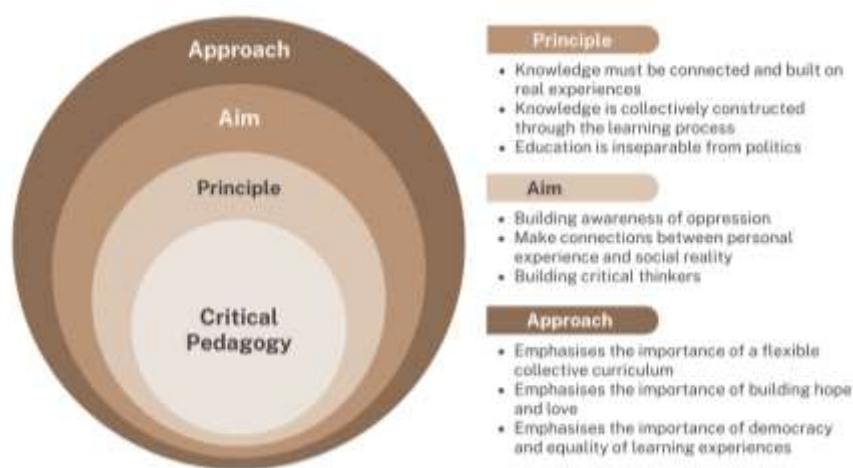
The Tadabbur method has an impact on getting closer to the Qur'an's content. In Freire's view, reading is an activity to read the word and the world, but tadabbur invites us to do three levels of reading: reading on the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines (Pratama, 2021). These three levels of reading must be passed by: (1) looking for the benefits contained in the verse, (2) connecting the verse to life experience, (3) reflecting on oneself through action in the process of goodness.

## **DISCUSSION**

Stemming from the humanist philosophy of Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy has established itself historically and theoretically as a phenomenal and influential educational thought on an international scale. It was born in response to the feudalism that was rife at the time in its birthplace. Critical pedagogy carries the humanization of praxis which aims to liberate humans from hegemony that alienates the potential of the learners themselves (Hendriani & Nuryani, 2018).

Paulo Freire's thinking is a critical response to intellectual hegemony through the curriculum to mold students who fit into the view of power relations. This style of education is called bank education. This kind of education shows binary contradictions (1) teachers teach, students learn; (2) teachers know everything, students know nothing; (3) teachers think, students think; (4) teachers talk, students hear; (5) teachers organize, students are organized, (6) teachers choose and impose their choices, (7) teachers act, students imagine how to act following the teacher's actions; (8) the teacher chooses what to teach, students adapt; (9) the teacher confuses the authority of science with the authority of professionalism, and contrasts it with student freedom; (10) the teacher is the subject of the learning process and the student is the object (Bahri, 2019; Fatimaningrum, 2011). From the perspective of post-colonial thought, this kind of bank education is an act of oppression because it negates aspects of independence owned by students as human beings. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, involves autonomy and emancipates students to take responsibility for problem-solving based on collective consciousness (Thomson-Bunn, 2014). Critical pedagogy aims to develop critical thinkers who construct new knowledge, reflect on knowledge to build critical awareness of collective oppression, and make connections between personal experiences and broader social realities (Smith & Seal, 2021).

The key to critical pedagogy is the development of critical consciousness (conscientization) aimed at making learners able to read all forms of social and cultural realities that surround them. For critical pedagogy, knowledge must be contextual, neutral, objective, and authentic. The production of knowledge in the pedagogical framework emphasizes objectivity and unique collaboration. Objective knowledge is derived from the abstraction of knowledge values from actual experiences. The objectivity of this knowledge provides reflective knowledge to reject, rethink, and challenge the knowledge taught in school institutions (Ledwith, 2001). Knowledge must be connected to real experiences to reach a more expansive social reality. This is called the concept of praxis, where a learner can internalize theory with experience (McMahon, 2011; Ord, 2004).



**Figure 2. Principles, Aims and Approaches of Critical Pedagogy** (Smith & Seal, 2021)

The main goal of critical pedagogy is to create students who can think critically in responding to social problems and become creators of knowledge themselves. In addition, they are also able to apply and relate the knowledge they have to respond to social problems that are constantly changing and developing (Setiadi et al., 2023). In its development through critical pedagogy, a student is expected to be able to face social problems through critical actions.

This radical idea can be achieved through a humanistic approach that places students in their essence as human beings. Critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of cooperation in building emancipatory education. This whole approach cannot be built on the shackling power relations between teachers and students but is based on intra-personal trust. The power relation changes from one that places things in a binary manner to a more fundamental foundation: love and trust. In learning practices, teachers and students are trained to respect cultural or social differences to improve social justice (Raihani, 2020). This justice in the classroom will release the boundaries of intellectual hegemony between teachers and students.

In its development, critical pedagogy places literacy as the primary tool in achieving critical consciousness (conscientization). Literacy can be a source of ideologically defined meaning production (Ioannidou, 2015). Meanwhile, according to Cooper & White (Hendriani & Nuryani, 2018) critical literacy is related to the process of self-efficacy to read, accompanied by an attitude of gathering information and motivation to influence positive social change. Critical literacy is the starting point of a series of critical pedagogy applications.

Critical literacy means not only reading words but also reading the world. Critical literacy is oriented toward awareness through critical reflection on social and historical situations to be applied to critical action. Critical literacy is the initial gate in forming awareness through a dialectical process or hypothesizing questions about students' conditions until a critical awareness arises to move towards social change. This critical awareness leads learning to two things: (1) critical thinking skills to conduct a thorough investigation of real social phenomena and situations experienced by students and (2) hopes and possibilities for equality and freedom in different lives where students are positioned in emancipatory and multicultural relationships during learning (Wattimena, 2018). This is in line with the opinion of (Alwasilah, 2012) where literacy is seen as a life skill that allows humans to function optimally as members of society.

The concept of dialectics is the epistemological foundation of critical literacy. In Freire's view "Education is not the transfer of knowledge, but the encounter of subjects in dialogue and the search for the significance of objects from the process of knowing and thinking" (Regganis et al., 2021). Dialectics is the process of exchanging knowledge that occurs in the learning space from the results of internalization and contextualization of the value of knowledge and then sharing it to achieve collective knowledge to be interpreted together.

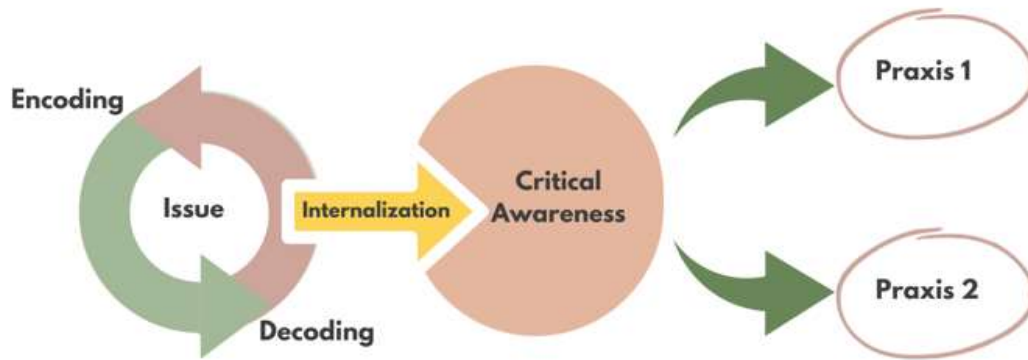


Figure 3. Critical Literacy Process

Figure 3 shows the dialectical process in critical literacy. The codification and decodification process shows the two-way relationship between teachers and students in dialogical work to solve problems. Codification is marking work, a process where the teacher provides a stimulus that leads to the problem. Then, jointly decode by describing the problem in the domains of findings from contextualisation with real experiences faced by students (Hendriani & Nuryani, 2018; Rengganis et al., 2019). This process symbolizes the essential activity of students' creativity and thinking through stimulation and reflection. However, it will only be dialogical if teachers and students break down the hierarchical boundaries in the classroom. Teachers and students must jointly thin the boundaries by giving trust until learning is gradually filled with love between teachers and students. In other words, the learning process is a medium for transforming social nobility values based on mutual respect and love and avoiding dehumanization and exploitation of one group or another.

This problematization practice illustrates human freedom as a free, creative, objectively rational, unprejudiced, and introspective being toward the ever-changing social reality (Rasyid, 2019). This is the essence of conscientization. The right instrument is needed to foster this critical awareness by giving students an understanding of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis can be used as a scalpel in revealing the ideology in it (Hendriani & Nuryani, 2018; Sarasati, 2020).

The final impact of the learning process is the growth of critical action-reflection that is mutually sustainable in uncovering problems that are constantly growing and developing. Human creative power creates praxis that is different from one another depending on the internalization of the values they receive. Critical action can start by investigating facts, formulating broader social issues, tensions, and contradictions behind the issue, and then planning actions to see the interrelationship of the forces behind the issue while seeing the impact that is useful for them (Rengganis et al., 2019; Smith & Seal, 2021).

### Reflections on SLM

The current practice of the SLM only focuses on providing stimulus to increase motivation to read. Knowledge production is obtained from reading activities, which assumes that students can retrieve knowledge based on what they read. Information is taken and interpreted by itself to be utilized as knowledge. The habituation method with 15 minutes before lessons is used in order to increase students' motivation and interest in reading.

Based on the good practices of the two informal education communities, reflective steps can be taken to provide alternatives for the practice of the SLM.

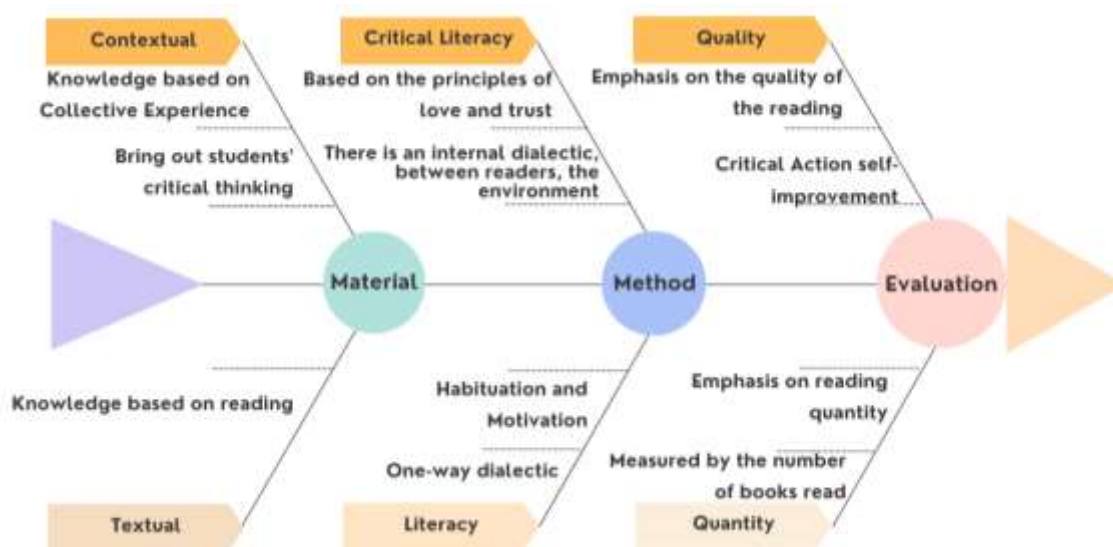


Figure 4. Reflection on School Literacy Program

#### *Build Critical Material*

In order to bring out students' critical thinking, teachers need to sort and select literacy materials to give to their students. Teachers can provide contextualized material that their students directly experience. So far, there is a gap between the knowledge that cannot be applied directly to real problems that occur because students' abstraction skills between theory and application are not built. This is due to the distance between the material and the knowledge possessed by students.

Critical literacy practices can build a bridge between theory and reality through the presence of reading materials that are contextualized and experienced directly by students as readers. Providing critical materials can provide opportunities for students to rethink and even cancel the theories they have received so far during classroom learning (Smith & Seal, 2021).

The practice of the SLM should build students' critical thinking competencies in order to solve problems that occur in their lives (Sabarudin, 2018). In order to avoid gaps between the theories learned at school and the reality in the field, the paradigm of text always going hand in hand with context should be used in the framework of building reading practices in the school environment.

#### *Praxis on Critical Method*

In the current educational framework, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning. A good facilitator is able to observe the psychological condition, cognitive condition, and social condition of their students. The facilitator is able to act as a good listener and then give directions on what to do. In other words, the teacher is a good listener.

This position provides a fair and balanced communication pattern. The teacher does not impose his knowledge to be forced into knowledge input for students. The teacher's role is to listen and then give direction according to the context of literacy learning. From this, a sense of trust emerges from students toward teachers based on the similarity of knowledge, position, and reality experienced.

The good practices carried out by the two communities provide a new understanding that dialectics in reading practice can be carried out by involving all aspects, namely internal aspects, which include cognitive understanding and fostering good character (Pratiwi, 2019), communal aspects between students and other students, and environmental aspects that provide a context between reality and the knowledge gained.



### *Quality-based Evaluation*

So far, the measurement of reading ability has been based on the principle of quantity. Students who successfully apply the SLM are measured by the number of books they have read completely. In the good practices carried out by the two communities, reading evaluation and achievement are measured based on critical actions in the form of written works or reflective responses to evoke a sense of ethics in oneself.

A valid measurement tool must comprehensively measure the quality of students in accordance with the process, the material learned, the methods used, and the assessment given through facts applied in the community environment (Pratiwi, 2019). The evaluation of SLM can be done by providing reading stimulation that is not too much. Then, students are directed to make a particular journal of reading responses and then collectively design solutions to problems encountered in the reading. The journal and action are then used as an evaluation instrument based on the quality of reading results that are valid and objective in accordance with the practices carried out by students in the field.

## **CONCLUSION**

Best practices of informal education communities provide an alternative way of implementing the SLM. These good practices are based on the principles of critical pedagogy, which include critical literacy, critical awareness, dialectics, and critical action. Reading practices are expected to develop critical thinking skills, which are then internalized based on real-life experiences and then translated into critical actions.

In Ngampar Boekoe Community, the practice of critical literacy is expressed in book-reading activities. The members take turns reading one sentence in the book and then responding by giving comments, views, or predictive ideas according to the scientific fields owned by the members. In this activity, there is a discussion process that involves the cognitive process of the intersection of the text read the scientific principles owned with the reality that occurs collectively. Book reading activities also provide a reflective view that reading practices are measured by quality, not the amount of reading completed. The quality can be proven by the written work made by its members on the results of their reading.

Jamaah Maiyah Al-Manhal Malang provides a view through the text of the Qur'an that a text can be easily interpreted using the contextualization method to measure the extent of one's position. Good practices carried out through Tadabbur Al Qur'an activities reflect reading activities that are able to touch three dimensions or levels: (1) on the lines or reading comprehension, (2) between the lines or reading inherent in experience, (3) beyond the lines or predictive reading accompanied by changes in behaviour and wisdom.

The practice of the SLM can start by giving students concrete experiences of the texts they read. The material presented must be able to build students' critical thinking toward a real problem faced collectively. The teacher can read out a sentence in the book, then students understand and then respond to the sentence. The teacher can be a facilitator as well as an excellent listener to foster love and trust in learning. The teacher can provide opportunities for students to discuss with each other using the basis of authentic experiences that students have in order to seek collective knowledge. Finally, the teacher can instruct the students to write down their responses in a journal that can be used as a teacher evaluation instrument.

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