



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: [www.ijirss.com](http://www.ijirss.com)



## Community volunteers and literacy activism in rural Indonesia: A phenomenological study from West Java

 Muhammad Irsyad Alfatih<sup>1\*</sup>,  Edwin Rizal<sup>2</sup>,  Nuryah Asri Sjafirah<sup>3</sup>,  Agus Rusmana<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>*Faculty of Communication Science, Universitas Padjadjaran Bandung, Indonesia.*

Corresponding author: Muhammad Irsyad Alfatih (Email: [muhammad22274@mail.unpad.ac.id](mailto:muhammad22274@mail.unpad.ac.id))

### Abstract

Community-based libraries in rural Indonesia have become pivotal in promoting literacy and empowerment. Through a phenomenological lens, this study examines the lived experiences of "literacy activist" volunteers at Warung Baca Lebakwangi (Warabal), a community library in a rural West Java village. The research explores how volunteers construct meaning around their literacy activism, what motivates their sustained engagement, and how their actions impact the community. The researchers collected data via in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions with 15 volunteers and analyzed them thematically. Findings reveal that volunteers join the literacy movement driven by value-oriented and affective motives (e.g., altruism, community duty) and personal growth needs. Over time, they internalize an identity as "literacy activists," reinforced by community recognition and tangible improvements in local reading habits. The Warabal case illustrates how socially constructed roles and shared values sustain a grassroots literacy initiative in a rural socio-cultural context. Volunteers' narratives highlight the interplay of individual motivation (the desire to "give back," religious/personal values, skill development) and social processes (norms of gotong royong or communal help, local support networks) in shaping literacy activism. This study contributes to understanding volunteer-driven literacy efforts as a product of social construction and a catalyst for informal education and empowerment in marginalized communities.

**Keywords:** Circular economy, Digital literacy, Digital transformation, Rural msme, Sustainable development.

**DOI:** 10.53894/ijirss.v8i5.8673

**Funding:** This work is supported by Perpustakaan Nasional (National Library), Indonesia.

**History:** Received: 30 May 2025 / Revised: 7 July 2025 / Accepted: 9 July 2025 / Published: 18 July 2025

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The Ethical Committee of the Research and Publication Ethics Commission, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia has granted approval for this study on 20 September 2024 (Ref. No. 358/LIT06/PPM-LIT/2024).

**Publisher:** Innovative Research Publishing

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia faces persistent challenges in literacy and reading culture despite near-universal basic literacy rates. National and international assessments have highlighted low reading interest and proficiency levels among Indonesians, especially youth. For instance, the OECD's 2018 PISA survey ranked Indonesia 74th out of 79 countries in student reading performance, with scores declining since 2015. Only a small minority of Indonesian children are active readers; one survey found that merely around 10% of children above age ten had a strong interest in reading books. Limited access to books and learning resources is a contributing factor, particularly in rural areas [1, 2]. Public libraries are scarce or poorly resourced in many villages, creating "book deserts" where children grow up with few reading materials. Bridging this gap has required community initiatives. Recently, a grassroots literacy movement has spread across Indonesia, led by volunteers often termed "pegiat literasi" (literacy activists). These volunteers establish and run informal community libraries, mobile book services, and reading circles to promote a reading culture in their localities. Media and public discourse have increasingly recognized the importance of these activists in reaching remote communities; as a national news outlet observed, literacy activists play an important role in increasing the public's reading interest and opening access to books in Indonesia's remote areas [3, 4].

Lebakwangi, a rural village in the Parung sub-district of Bogor, West Java, offers a compelling example of this phenomenon. In 1997, a local woman named Kiswanti, affectionately known as Bude Kis, founded the Warung Baca Lebak Wangi, literally "Lebak Wangi Reading Stall," often shortened to "Warabal." Motivated by her own limited formal schooling and a passion for educating children in her community, she started Warabal as a small lending library in a wooden shack at the end of a narrow village lane [5]. Stocking it with second-hand books purchased from selling traditional herbal drinks, Kiswanti created a welcoming space where village children could read storybooks for free. Over the next twenty-five years, Warabal evolved from a one-woman initiative into a community institution. It now houses thousands of books and hosts various learning activities from after-school tutoring and weekend reading classes to an early childhood education program all offered at no cost to villagers. Crucially, this growth has been driven by volunteers from the community. As of the time of the study, Warung Baca Lebakwangi had 24 active volunteers (18 women and 6 men), ranging from teenagers to middle-aged adults, all working without pay to manage the library and teach the children. These volunteers identify as literacy activists, including Kiswanti and many others she inspired. They have become local champions of reading, devoting their time and effort to "make books accessible and learning enjoyable" for village youth.

This study examines how the volunteers at Warabal socially construct their roles as literacy activists and sustain their commitment in a rural, resource-constrained context. While numerous studies have extolled the importance of community libraries for development and education [6, 7], there is a relative paucity of research into the lived experiences and subjective meanings of the volunteers who make these initiatives possible. Prior research on libraries and volunteerism in both developed and developing contexts provides important background. For example, Abu et al. [6] highlight that rural public libraries serve as social and cultural institutions in their communities, going beyond mere collections of books. These libraries often become hubs for community empowerment and lifelong learning. However, sustaining such libraries depends on volunteer labor, which presents challenges.

In the UK, austerity-driven shifts have led public libraries to increasingly rely on volunteers, a trend accompanied by debates about service quality, volunteer training, and the balance between professional staff and community volunteers [8, 9]. Found that while volunteers can help keep libraries open amid government funding cuts, library managers raised concerns about maintaining consistent service standards and managing volunteer programs effectively in the "Big Society" era. Similarly, Casselden et al. [8] noted that stakeholders appreciated volunteers' contributions to "keeping the doors open" during budget crises, yet uncertainties lingered regarding the long-term sustainability of volunteer-run libraries in England [8].

In rural North America and other settings, volunteer-driven library projects have demonstrated the possibilities and complexities of community action. For instance, White [10] documents the Rural Library Project in the United States, where local volunteers organized to build library facilities in underserved Georgia towns – effectively "building libraries, building community" [10]. Such cases underscore that volunteerism can provide vital infrastructure and services, but also require significant dedication and social capital [11, 12]. The Indonesian context presents unique socio-cultural dimensions to literacy volunteerism. A tradition of "gotong royong" (collective mutual aid) is deeply ingrained in many rural communities, potentially encouraging volunteer efforts. Indeed, many literacy activists frame their work as a form of community service or religious duty, aligning with local altruism and social solidarity values [13, 14].

Research on literacy movements in Indonesia has started to explore these dynamics. Andini [15], for example, a phenomenological study of street library activists in Malang found that the volunteers cultivated a personal sense of mission and meaning through their literacy work, which helped them persist despite minimal resources [15]. Local surveys have also observed that community libraries can positively influence reading interest. Ncube [16] notes that well-managed community libraries in East Java significantly improved the reading habits of nearby residents, suggesting that volunteer-led initiatives can indeed make measurable impacts on literacy at the grassroots level Ncube [16]. Priyanto et al. [17] highlight how Gunungkidul Public Library has transformed from a traditional reading space into a community empowerment hub by offering practical skills training and entrepreneurial support. By decentralizing activities to rural libraries during the pandemic, the initiative not only expanded access but also deepened community engagement and economic participation [17]. However, much of the existing literature is either programmatic or focused on outcomes (e.g., increases in book circulation or reading frequency) rather than on the volunteers' subjective experiences driving these programs.

Although community libraries have been widely recognized for their developmental role in Indonesia, existing research primarily focuses on their educational outcomes or operational models. Less attention has been given to the lived experiences and identity formation of the volunteers behind these initiatives, particularly in rural, resource-constrained environments. This study addresses this gap by examining how literacy volunteers in Lebakwangi construct and sustain their roles as “activists” within a broader socio-cultural and theoretical framework. While international literature on volunteerism in libraries, particularly in the UK and US, has explored issues of service quality, sustainability, and policy support, Indonesia’s grassroots literacy movement represents a distinct phenomenon. Here, informal literacy activism arises from below, fueled by cultural values such as *gotong royong* (mutual aid) and religiously motivated altruism, often without government support or formal structures. These conditions require a conceptual lens sensitive to local meaning-making. To explore these dynamics, this study draws on Max Weber’s theory of social action and Berger and Luckmann’s social construction of reality to understand how the identity of “literacy activist” emerges and endures in the Indonesian rural context.

This study investigates how volunteers at a rural community library perceive and construct their roles as literacy activists, as well as the motivations and social factors that influence their sustained engagement. A phenomenological approach is employed to explore the lived experiences and meanings of the volunteers, complemented by sociological theories to interpret how individual actions relate to broader social structures and cultural contexts. Max Weber’s theory of social action offers a framework for classifying and understanding volunteers’ motivations and behaviors in terms of subjective meaning [18, 19]. The social construction of reality framework helps examine how the concept of a “literacy activist” and the practice of volunteerism in this context become established as a social reality through externalization, objectivation, and internalization processes [20-22]. Furthermore, volunteer motivation frameworks by McCurley and Lynch [23], specifically the Join–Stay–Leave model [24], the Three Needs theory and the Agenda for Action offer insights into the factors that attract individuals to volunteer, the needs that keep them committed, and the alignment of personal purpose with community action.

By blending these theoretical perspectives, we aim to provide a rich, multi-faceted analysis of literacy volunteerism as both an individual social action and a socially constructed collective phenomenon. In the following sections, we first review relevant literature on rural libraries and volunteerism, then detail the methodology of our phenomenological case study. The researchers then present an integrated results and discussion section, interweaving volunteers’ narratives (including direct quotes from participants) with theoretical interpretation. Through this analysis, we elucidate how a group of ordinary villagers in Lebakwangi came to see themselves and be seen by others as literacy activists transforming their community.

## 2. Background: Rural Libraries

Rural libraries have been widely recognized as critical nodes for community development, social inclusion, and empowerment, especially in areas underserved by formal educational institutions. Unlike urban libraries with abundant resources, rural libraries often operate on the fringes of government support, yet they fill an essential gap by providing access to information and learning opportunities [25]. Rural public libraries in disadvantaged communities are more than just shelves of books; they function as dynamic social and cultural institutions that anchor community life. These libraries frequently host literacy classes, skill-training workshops, and community gatherings, contributing to adult education and local development initiatives [6]. Rural libraries can empower community members by providing them with the tools and knowledge to improve their economic and social conditions [26].

Research in various contexts has highlighted both the potential and challenges of this volunteer-driven model. Ncube [16] notes that in Zimbabwe, public libraries (including rural ones) are increasingly expected to align with national development goals. However, they are constrained by funding and rely on community goodwill to maintain services [16]. Similarly, White [10] documents how a nonprofit initiative in the United States mobilized volunteers and local donors to construct library buildings in small towns, reflecting a broader principle that community participation is key to building and sustaining library services [10]. These examples underscore that while external support (from governments or NGOs) is valuable, the energy and commitment of residents often determine a rural library’s success [27, 28]. A community that values education will find ways to keep its library alive, even if that means rotating volunteer shifts or donating books and supplies [29].

In the Indonesian context, Taman Baca Masyarakat (TBM), or Community Reading Gardens, encapsulates a model of small, locally operated libraries. TBMs are typically initiated by residents or local educators and may operate out of homes, mosques, village halls, or simple shacks [30]. They provide reading materials and literacy activities in communities without formal libraries. TBMs have been actively promoted as part of Indonesia’s Gerakan Literasi Nasional (National Literacy Movement) since 2016. This nationwide movement acknowledges that improving literacy requires community-based efforts tailored to local contexts [31, 32]. Rural TBMs often serve diverse functions: they might double as tutoring centers for school children, venues for women’s group meetings, or safe spaces for youth to spend time constructively [33, 34]. Empowerment through information is a recurring theme. For example, a study by Rohman et al. [35] on a community literacy movement in Sumedang, West Java, it was found that the local reading center not only increased reading frequency among villagers but also became a platform for disseminating useful knowledge, such as agricultural advice and health information, to the community [35].

In short, rural libraries in Indonesia and elsewhere serve as vital community assets that promote informal education, intergenerational learning, and social cohesion [36, 37]. However, these benefits come with challenges. Rural libraries often struggle with shortages of books and educational materials, limited hours of operation, and a lack of trained librarians

[38, 39]. Technology access is another dividing line – many rural libraries cannot offer computers or the internet, which are increasingly important for modern literacy and information access. Additionally, cultural factors may influence library use; in some rural areas, reading culture is not yet established, so librarians and volunteers must first convince people (especially children) that reading can be a valuable and enjoyable activity [40, 41]. Despite these obstacles, many rural libraries persist and even thrive through community resilience and innovation.

Kine and Davidsone [42] provide a European example from Latvia, where rural public libraries took the initiative in promoting media literacy and civic participation. Even with modest means, librarians collaborated with local communities to hold workshops that educated citizens on navigating information in the digital age Kine and Davidsone [42]. Yari and Bahrami [43] found that rural public libraries in Kermanshah, Iran, play a crucial role in empowering communities by supporting cultural, economic, and social development through inclusive and sustained programs. Despite facing resource and participation challenges, these libraries serve as vital socio-cultural hubs that foster individual and collective growth in rural areas [43]. This indicates that whether in developing or developed nations, rural libraries can adapt to contemporary literacy needs if driven by committed individuals. In summary, the literature on rural libraries reveals their dual role as educational resources and community empowerment centers, and it highlights the significance of local volunteer involvement in sustaining them. These findings set the stage for examining our case in Indonesia, where a volunteer-based rural library embodies these global patterns in a unique socio-cultural milieu.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1. Social Construction of Volunteers**

Volunteers are the lifeblood of many rural libraries and literacy initiatives. Understanding their motivations, identities, and social contexts is crucial to sustaining such programs. From a theoretical standpoint, volunteering is a form of social action imbued with meaning. Max Weber's typology of social action, distinguishing traditional, affective, value-rational, and instrumental (goal-rational) actions [44] is a useful starting point to consider why individuals become literacy volunteers. A traditional action might be volunteering because it is expected in one's community or family (e.g., a local tradition of gotong royong encourages helping at the library as a normal communal duty). An effective action would be driven by emotion – for instance, empathy for underprivileged children or passion for books could spur someone to teach reading. A value-rational action involves a conscious belief in the value of literacy and education as a cause worth pursuing for its own sake; many literacy activists articulate a conviction that spreading knowledge is inherently meaningful, reflecting what Weber would call value-oriented rationality [45, 46]. Finally, an instrumental action might involve volunteering to achieve a more calculated goal, such as gaining experience for a future career in education or building social connections.

In reality, volunteers' motives often intertwine these types; a literacy activist could be simultaneously driven by compassion (affectual), a sense of moral obligation (value-rational), and the pragmatic benefit of improving her own teaching skills (instrumental). Weber's framework alerts us to this multidimensionality of motivation, emphasizing the subjective meaning each volunteer attaches to their involvement [47, 48]. Rather than assuming volunteers are purely selfless or purely self-interested, it allows us to examine how they interpret their own actions. The term "literacy activist" is itself a social construct that has gained currency in Indonesia. According to Berger and Luckmann [21], roles and institutions are created through a dialectical process of externalization, objectivation, and internalization [20, 21]. In the context of library volunteers, externalization occurs when individuals act upon their ideas or values [49] for example, when Kiswanti started teaching children in her village, she was externalizing her personal belief in the importance of reading.

As more people joined and the activity continued regularly, an objective reality began to crystallize: the community library and the role of "library volunteer" became an established, recognized part of village life. This is the stage of objectivation, where the once-novel activity is seen as a social fact [50, 51]. Villagers come to expect that on weekends, the Warabal will be open and volunteers will be there to help children read. The term "pegiat literasi" itself is a linguistic objectification of this reality, turning the practice into a named social category. Finally, internalization occurs as individuals (both the volunteers themselves and community members) internalize the values and norms associated with this role [52, 53]. New volunteers learn "what it means" to be a literacy activist by observing others and hearing community feedback, gradually incorporating that identity into their own self-concept.

Through this lens, the "literacy activist" is not just a role people play but a reality that is continuously constructed and affirmed through social interactions and shared meanings [54]. The motivations of volunteers have been extensively studied in the fields of volunteer management and psychology. Common reasons for joining a volunteer effort include a desire to support a cause one believes in, to help others, to gain personal or professional experience, or to fulfill social or religious obligations [55]. Reasons volunteers stay can differ from why they joined; retention is often linked to enjoyment of the work [56, 57] a sense of achievement or seeing positive results, camaraderie with other volunteers, and feeling appreciated. For example, a Warabal volunteer might continue year after year because she finds joy in reading stories to children and witnessing their progress "I see the kids' eyes light up when they finally can read a sentence on their own; that happiness keeps me coming back," as one volunteer in this study expressed. Organizational support and the fulfillment of expectations are also crucial to staying; volunteers who feel useful and see the library making a difference are likely to remain committed. Conversely, reasons to leave include burnout, unmet expectations, time constraints, or life changes. If a volunteer expected a more social experience but finds herself working alone cataloguing books, or if personal commitments (a new job, family duties) conflict with volunteering time, she might withdraw. Understanding these phases is key for sustaining volunteer-based programs.

### **3.2. The Three Needs Theory and Agenda for Action Framework**

The Three Needs theory posits that individuals are motivated by three primary types of needs: achievement, affiliation, and power (or influence) [58, 59]. In volunteer settings, an achievement-oriented person seeks challenges and tangible results; they might be motivated by setting up a successful reading program or seeing a measurable improvement in children's reading levels. Such individuals appreciate feedback and opportunities to lead projects. Relationships drive an affiliation-oriented person – they value friendships, team spirit, and the sense of belonging that volunteering provides. In a community library, these might be volunteers who come initially because their friends invited them, and they stay because the library group feels like a “second family” where they share mutual support.

Finally, a power-oriented person seeks to influence or direct others; volunteering can manifest positively as taking charge of organizing activities or negatively if someone seeks personal authority inappropriately. McClelland [60] notes that the power motive is a double-edged sword in volunteerism; some degree of desire to effect change (a constructive form of influence) can fuel strong leadership [60, 61]. Still, if a volunteer is overly power-seeking, it may conflict with the collaborative, altruistic ethos of service. Effective volunteer programs often satisfy all three needs: giving achievement-oriented volunteers goals and recognition, providing affiliation-oriented volunteers with social interaction and appreciation (like team gatherings and shout-outs), and channeling the influence motive by empowering volunteers with meaningful responsibilities and leadership roles when appropriate.

The agenda for action framework complements the above by examining how volunteers align their motivations with the organization's or cause's mission [62]. People volunteer when the opportunity resonates with their self-identity, functional needs, or connection to the community. An identity motivator means volunteering is part of how someone defines themselves or their social group (“I am the kind of person who helps out” or “As a member of this community, it is my role to volunteer”). A functional motivator is about the activity fulfilling a personal goal or need (learning new skills, gaining experience, staying active). Community connection refers to a sense of responsibility or attachment to a community or cause, volunteering because one feels a bond with those served or the locale.

Critically, when the volunteer role fulfills the individual's inner purpose and also meets community needs, it creates a virtuous cycle: the volunteer is personally satisfied and thus more likely to continue, and the community benefits from their sustained involvement. The identity aspect ties back to the social construction perspective. As volunteers engage over time, many internalize “volunteer” or “activist” as part of their identity [63]. Research by Colibaba et al. [63] on older volunteers in rural Canadian libraries, the analysis shows that these libraries can become “contested spaces” of voluntarism where identities and roles are negotiated. Older volunteers sometimes saw the library as their domain of contribution. They derived significant pride and purpose from it, even as communities debated the extent to which services should rely on unpaid labor [64].

For example, literacy activists from different villages might meet at national workshops or be featured together in media stories, which helps solidify the notion that they are part of a larger movement, not just isolated volunteers. In summary, volunteers at community libraries operate at the intersection of personal motivation and social structure. Their work is motivated by altruistic values, emotional satisfaction, social relationships, and sometimes pragmatic considerations. The role of “library volunteer” or “literacy activist” emerges through social processes and carries certain cultural expectations [65]. By applying these theoretical insights, we can better interpret the experiences of the Warabal volunteers: why they join, how they sustain their efforts, and how they come to collectively define what it means to be a literacy activist in their village.

## **4. Materials and Method**

This research employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology, grounded in a constructivist paradigm, to deeply explore the experiences of Warabal's literacy activist volunteers. Phenomenology, as a research approach, seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by understanding how it is perceived and lived by individuals [66, 67]. In this study, the phenomenon of interest is being a literacy volunteer in a rural community library. We specifically drew on Alfred Schutz's interpretive phenomenology and Berger & Luckmann's social constructionism as theoretical orientations, which align with examining subjective meanings within a social context [68, 69]. This approach assumes that reality, in this case the reality of being a “literacy activist,” is not objectively given but is co-constructed through the volunteers' lived experiences and interactions. By using phenomenology, we aim to capture the rich, first-person accounts of volunteers, their motivations, struggles, joys, and interpretations of their journey and then relate these to larger conceptual frameworks.

### **4.1. Data Collection**

We utilized multiple qualitative methods to gather data, primarily: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions. Prior to formal data collection, we spent time building rapport with the community and volunteers. The first author visited Warabal on numerous occasions over a period of six months (from March to August 2024) to engage informally with volunteers and library users, which helped in gaining trust and contextual understanding. After this immersion, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of volunteers. From the roster of 24 active volunteers, we selected 15 individuals, ensuring diversity in age, gender, length of service, and role (founder, senior volunteers, newer recruits, student volunteers, etc.). This purposive sampling aligns with Schutz's emphasis on capturing a variety of perspectives to reveal the structure of the experience [70, 71]. Interviews were conducted primarily in Indonesian, with Sundanese terms used occasionally by participants due to local dialect influence. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

In addition to one-on-one interviews, we conducted focus group discussions (FGDs), each comprising 5–6 volunteers. The FGDs aimed to facilitate collective reflection and observe group dynamics among the volunteers. One FGD primarily involved younger volunteers (high school/college age), while the other included older volunteers, such as the founder and two local mothers. The group setting encouraged participants to exchange ideas and sometimes revealed consensus or differing opinions on topics like "what motivates us" or "how the village responds to our work," thereby enriching our data. All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential in reporting; pseudonyms or role descriptors are used instead of real names, except in contextual descriptions where the founder's first name is used with permission, as she is a publicly recognized figure.

Participant observation was equally vital. The researcher joined several library sessions as a participant-observer, helping to shelve books, sitting in on storytelling classes, and attending volunteer meetings. Detailed field notes were kept to record observations of interactions (e.g., how volunteers engage with children, how they coordinate among themselves, moments of enthusiasm or frustration, etc.), as well as the physical and social setting of Warabal. This observational data provided context and helped validate or contrast with self-reported data from interviews. For instance, a volunteer might say in an interview that they feel very confident leading a reading group, but observations might show moments of hesitation or seeking help from others. Such triangulation between what people say and what they do strengthened the study's findings or led to further questions for clarification in follow-ups.

The research team remained aware of our own positions. As outside researchers (neither residents of Lebakwangi nor prior members of Warabal), we approached the community with humility and a learning mindset. We shared our research goals with participants transparently and even conducted a brief literacy workshop for the volunteers (on request) as a way to reciprocate and not be solely extractive in our interactions. Throughout the analysis, we engaged in reflexive memo-writing to examine how our interpretations might be influenced by our assumptions or backgrounds, striving to let participants' voices and perspectives guide the narrative [72, 73].

#### *4.2. Ethical Considerations*

The study followed standard ethical protocols for research with human subjects [40]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Given the close-knit nature of the community, confidentiality was emphasized; we took care to anonymize personal details in research notes and reports. For the founder, who is a public figure locally and within literacy activist networks, we obtained explicit permission to mention aspects of her story, as she viewed it as a way to inspire others. Nonetheless, we treat her interview content with the same analytical rigor as that of other participants. No monetary compensation was provided for participation; however, we offered refreshments during focus group discussions and small tokens of appreciation, such as a donated set of new children's books for the library in the volunteers' names. These gestures helped maintain a positive relationship and were culturally appropriate.

#### *4.3. Research Participants*

The participants in this study (the 15 interviewed volunteers and an additional 6 engaged via FGDs, noting overlap) represent a cross-section of Warabal's volunteer base. To contextualize the findings, we provide a brief profile of the key participant categories (using pseudonyms or role titles): The Founder (Kiswanti, Ibu Kis) – Age 55: The initiator of Warung Baca Lebakwangi, with a junior high school education. She is a housewife and herbal drink seller by trade, who channeled her love for reading into founding Warabal. Ibu Kis serves as the *de facto* leader and mentor for other volunteers. Her perspective is central, as she has the longest tenure (27 years) and has witnessed the evolution of both the library and the volunteer team. In the study, she often provides historical insight and embodies the core values of the movement.

Senior Volunteers (5 individuals, ages 40–60): This group includes a retired elementary school teacher (referred to here as "Pak Guru"), two mothers who started as volunteers when their children were young ("Bu Entik" and "Bu Sari"), a village official who volunteers on weekends ("Pak RT"), and a local youth leader in his late 30s ("Mas Joni"). They have been with Warabal for anywhere from 5 to 15 years. Many in this group occupy leadership or coordinator roles informally; for example, the retired teacher helps design the tutoring curriculum, and the mothers manage the early childhood classes. They bring stability and often act as liaisons between Warabal and the broader community (for instance, organizing outreach events or dealing with local authorities).

Junior/Youth Volunteers (7 individuals, ages 16–25): Predominantly high school and college students from the village or nearby areas. Some are alumni of Warabal's reading programs who decided to give back. Pseudonyms like "Ayu" (a 17-year-old high school girl volunteering for 2 years), "Rizal" (a 19-year-old college student home on weekends who helps with English classes), and "Santi" (a 23-year-old who started volunteering in her teens and now leads the Sunday study club) represent this segment. They are typically energetic, tech-savvy (sometimes introducing ideas like using smartphones to show educational videos), and view volunteering as both a service and a personal development opportunity. Their involvement tends to be part-time due to school/college, but they are crucial in connecting with the children and bringing in new ideas.

Former beneficiaries-turned volunteers (3 individuals, ages 18–30): Overlapping with the youth category, these are individuals who literally "grew up" with Warabal. Notably, one participant ("Wati," age 25) recounted how she came to Warabal at age 10 as a struggling reader; through years of guidance, she improved academically, later became the first in her family to attend university, and now, as a professional teacher in a neighboring village, she returns on free days to tutor

at Warabal. Such participants offer valuable insight into the long-term impact of the library and carry a strong emotional attachment to it. They often see volunteering as a way to honor the help they received.

New Volunteers (2 individuals, ages approximately 30): To capture fresh perspectives, we also included a couple of volunteers who joined within the last year. For example, Dewi is a 32-year-old entrepreneur who moved to Lebakwangi after marriage and recently started volunteering to get involved in the community; Hendra is a 29-year-old who, after losing his job in the city during the pandemic, returned to the village and decided to contribute his time. New volunteers like them can highlight entry experiences and how welcoming or challenging it is to integrate into an established volunteer group. The names, positions, and roles of informants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
Research Participants.

| No. | Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Educational Background            | Years Volunteering | Main Role in Warabal                                       |
|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Ibu Kis   | Female | 55  | Junior High School                | 27 years           | Founder, coordinator, mentor                               |
| 2   | Bu Sari   | Female | 47  | High School                       | 8 years            | Early childhood teacher, PAUD coordinator                  |
| 3   | Bu Entik  | Female | 42  | High School                       | 6 years            | Literacy tutor for young children                          |
| 4   | Pak Guru  | Male   | 60  | Bachelor's Degree (Education)     | 10 years           | Curriculum planner, mathematics tutor                      |
| 5   | Mas Joni  | Male   | 38  | Diploma (Youth Development)       | 5 years            | Activity coordinator, outdoor events organizer             |
| 6   | Pak RT    | Male   | 50  | High School                       | 7 years            | Community relations and weekend volunteer                  |
| 7   | Wati      | Female | 25  | Bachelor's Degree (Midwifery)     | 6 years            | Health literacy tutor, youth mentor                        |
| 8   | Ayu       | Female | 20  | Undergraduate (Education)         | 3 years            | Reading tutor, early grade assistant                       |
| 9   | Rizal     | Male   | 19  | Undergraduate (English Language)  | 2 years            | English tutor                                              |
| 10  | Santi     | Female | 23  | Bachelor's Degree (Psychology)    | 5 years            | Weekend class leader                                       |
| 11  | Dewi      | Female | 32  | High School                       | 1 year             | Women's literacy facilitator, adult reading corner         |
| 12  | Hendra    | Male   | 29  | High School                       | 1 year             | Logistics and technical support                            |
| 13  | Yusuf     | Male   | 26  | Diploma                           | 4 years            | Student mentor, book inventory management                  |
| 14  | Lila      | Female | 18  | High School                       | 2 years            | PAUD assistant, basic literacy tutor                       |
| 15  | Neni      | Female | 21  | Undergraduate (Primary Education) | 2 years            | Storytelling sessions leader, weekend learning facilitator |

During analysis, we did not treat each individual as a separate case study; rather, we examined the collective themes and variations across these profiles. To maintain a coherent narrative in the Results and Discussion, we will refer to participants in a manner that conveys context while preserving anonymity. For instance, we might say “one senior volunteer (female, age 45) said...” or use a pseudonym like “Bu Entik” (senior volunteer, mother of two) when quoting. These attributions are linked to the profiles above. This approach ensures the human element is present, allowing readers to discern if the quote is from, for example, the founder versus a newer youth volunteer, which can be relevant for interpretation.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The findings from this study are organized around several interrelated themes that emerged from the phenomenological analysis. These include: (1) initial motivations and pathways into literacy activism, (2) the evolution of volunteer commitment and identity, (3) challenges faced and strategies for perseverance, and (4) perceived impacts on the community and the volunteers themselves. In discussing these themes, we integrate quotes from participants (translated into English where originally in Indonesian) and connect these lived experiences to the theoretical frameworks outlined earlier. The discussion is woven into the results to provide interpretation and context for each theme.

### 5.1. Becoming a Literacy Activist: Motivations and Social Action

The journey of each volunteer often began with a compelling personal motivation, which can be understood in Weberian terms as a mix of affective, value-rational, and sometimes instrumental actions. A common thread across many narratives was an emotional drive rooted in empathy for children and a passion for reading. For example, one senior volunteer (female, 47) who we'll call Bu Sari explained her reason for joining Warabal: *“I used to see kids in my neighborhood just playing in the dirt with nothing to read. It reminded me of my own childhood – I loved books but had*

none. My heart felt heavy seeing their potential waste away.” This quote illustrates an affective motivation (her heart felt heavy) combined with a recollection of personal experience. Bu Sari’s emotional response to the children’s situation spurred her into action, reflecting what Weber would label an affectual social action. Yet it was also value-oriented: she implicitly believes in the value of reading (“loved books”) and cannot stand by while children lack access, which demonstrates a value-rational commitment to the idea that children ought to have books.

Similarly, younger volunteers often cited inspiration and values instilled by others. A 19-year-old volunteer (Rizal) recounted how he was inspired by the founder’s story:

*“I heard about Bude Kis starting this from nothing selling herbal drinks to buy books. That dedication moved me. I thought, if someone can do so much with so little, why shouldn’t I pitch in too?”* (Interview with Informant Rizal, 2024).

In this reflection, Rizal demonstrates a value-rational motive, admiration for dedication to education, and an emerging sense of identity alignment, viewing volunteering as something one “should” do if sharing those values. His decision can be seen as an externalization of his new value orientation; by participating in Warabal, he externalizes his belief that supporting education is worthwhile. This also emphasizes the social influence of narratives and role models: the story of the founder functions as a social construction that establishes a precedent for action. By sharing Kiswanti’s story within the community and media, a template of “what a literacy activist is” was created, facilitating others like Rizal to internalize and emulate that role. Instrumental motivations were mentioned less frequently, but they were not absent. One practical benefit cited by some volunteers, particularly student volunteers, was skill development.

For instance, a college student volunteer (Ayu, 20) noted, *“Teaching here every week has helped me prepare to become a teacher in the future. I’ve learned how to be patient and explain things slowly.”* Ayu’s engagement is partly instrumental-rational – she consciously uses the volunteer experience to further her career goals (practicing teaching skills). However, she quickly added that this was not the only reason: *“Even if it didn’t help my career, I would still do it because seeing the kids’ progress is so rewarding.”* This emphasizes that instrumental reasons were often coupled with altruistic rewards.

In volunteer motivation theory terms, Ayu’s case exemplifies how functional motivators (gaining teaching experience) can align with identity and community connection motivators (she sees herself as someone who helps kids and feels tied to the community’s progress). Analyzing initial motivations through the Join–Stay–Leave lens, we find that Join factors for Warabal volunteers included: personal passion or interest in books (intrinsic interest), influence of role models (seeing others volunteer), empathy for local children’s needs, and social invitation (some volunteers joined because friends or family were involved and invited them – an affiliation-based entry). A notable detail is the role of prior beneficiaries joining as volunteers. Their motivation to join was deeply rooted in gratitude and identity: they had internalized the value of Warabal’s work through their own experience as children, so volunteering was almost a natural progression – an internalization of a norm that *“if you were helped by Warabal, you later help others at Warabal.”*

This kind of cycle reinforces the social construction of the volunteer role within the community, rendering it a self-perpetuating phenomenon. As a former beneficiary turned volunteer (male, 26) expressed, *“Warabal changed my life when I was a child struggling to read. Now it’s my turn to help other children.”* His statement exemplifies the externalization of an internalized norm (giving back) and is strongly value-rational, driven by a moral duty to assist as he was helped. Weber’s four types of social action are often intertwined within individual narratives. For example, consider the founder Kiswanti’s explanation of her motivation to establish Warabal: she recounted how, as a child, she was denied schooling due to poverty and gender biases (traditional societal attitudes), yet she harbored an intense desire to read. When she became a mother, she vowed to create opportunities for others. She stated, *“It was like a mission in my heart, I didn’t want the next generation to experience the same thirst for knowledge I had. Even if I wasn’t rich or educated, I believed I could do something.”*

In Kiswanti’s case: (1) Traditional elements: She often cites a proverb taught by her parents about sharing knowledge as charity, indicating a cultural tradition motivating her; (2) Affective: The emotional weight of her own past hardship and empathy for children is evident; (3) Value-Rational: She speaks of it as a “mission” and a belief in the cause of literacy; (4) Instrumental: She took very pragmatic steps (selling jamu drinks, saving money, networking with authors and journalists eventually) to achieve the goal of building a library, showing strategic action as well. Kiswanti’s narrative shows how a strong value-rational core (belief in equality of access to knowledge) guided her, supported by affective empathy, all enacted through both traditional values and instrumental means. This blend likely set the tone for Warabal’s volunteer culture, which combines heart-driven work with practical community organizing.

## 5.2. Sustaining Commitment: Volunteer Experience and Identity Construction

Once involved, volunteers’ reasons for staying evolved with their experiences. A significant finding is the emergence of a collective identity among the volunteers as “literacy activists” and the sense of ownership and pride they take in Warabal’s mission. Many participants described the volunteering experience as transformative for themselves. They reported gaining confidence, purpose, and a broadened perspective. One youth volunteer (female, 18) shared: *“Before, I was a shy girl who wouldn’t speak up. After a year of leading story time, I feel more confident not just here but in school, too. I feel like I am useful to others now.”* This comment illustrates how volunteering satisfied personal growth needs (achievement, building confidence) and fostered a positive self-concept. She now sees herself as “useful to others,” reflecting an internalization of the volunteer role into her identity. It also corresponds to the achievement need; she achieved personal growth and that success reinforces her commitment. The social bonds among volunteers emerged as a crucial retention factor. The atmosphere at Warabal was often described in familial terms. Volunteers refer to each other as siblings (kakak/adik) or use kinship terms like “Bude” (aunt) for Kiswanti, indicating close personal ties. One volunteer



(male, 30) said, *"We're like a family here. If one of us is busy or facing a problem, another steps in. I've made friends for life through Warabal."* This strong affiliation motive (sense of belonging) is clearly a reason to stay – leaving the volunteer group would mean losing a supportive social circle.

This dynamic confirms McCurley and Lynch [23] idea that affiliation-oriented volunteers will continue if they find a welcoming McCurley and Lynch [23] cooperative group. It also highlights how the library has become an objectified social reality: it is not just a place to volunteer; it is a community entity that people feel part of. The norms of mutual support and collective mission at Warabal contribute to a social construction of a volunteer community. Newcomers quickly learn that being a Warabal volunteer means being part of a team that cares about each other. We observed this in action during our fieldwork; for example, when one volunteer's motorbike broke down on route, others pooled money to get it fixed, and when another volunteer had a sick child, the team arranged a get-well card from the Warabal kids. These small acts reinforce solidarity and the idea that volunteering here is not an isolated act but part of a social network of action.

In Berger and Luckmann [21] terms, the volunteer group has its own subculture that members internalize, which strengthens retention. An important aspect of identity construction is the growing public recognition and validation of the volunteers' work. Volunteers reported that over time, they earned respect from community members who previously might have been indifferent or even disparaging. One middle-aged volunteer (male, 38, "Mas Joni") noted: *"In the beginning, some neighbors teased me – 'Why are you wasting your time with that library? Come join us in real work.' But now, those same people occasionally donate a little money for the kids' events and say we're doing a good job. It feels rewarding, like we changed how people think."* This shift in community attitude not only validates the volunteers' efforts (feeding into a sense of achievement and pride) but also signifies the objectivation phase – the volunteer role has become legitimized in the local social structure. As volunteering becomes seen as "real work" and valuable work, volunteers internalize a stronger sense of legitimacy and pride in what they do.

Several volunteers expressed that over the years, they have come to identify strongly with being literacy activists. It's not a temporary hobby; it's part of who they are. In one focus group, participants enthusiastically agreed with the statement *"Warabal is our pride."* One said, *"If someone asks me, who are you? I say, I'm a Warabal volunteer. That's as important to me as my paying job."* This demonstrates a high level of identity integration; the volunteer role is central to their self-definition. When volunteer roles reach this level of internalization, retention is almost assured, barring life events that physically prevent continuing. It aligns with the Identity motivator in the Agenda for Action framework, where volunteering becomes part of one's self-concept. It also resonates with what volunteer management scholars call the development of a volunteer role identity, a powerful force sustaining long-term commitment [74, 75].

From a Weberian perspective, Wui and Leviste [76], one could say that over time, there is a shift in the dominant type of social action exhibited by long-term volunteers. If initial involvement might lean on affective or value-rational action, continued involvement could become somewhat traditional in Weber's sense – not "traditional" in a historical sense, but in that volunteering becomes habitual, part of the routine, a norm expected of oneself. We observed this with older volunteers who had been with Warabal for a decade or more: volunteering became a regular part of their life's rhythm (e.g., every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, they automatically go to the library). They no longer constantly question why they volunteer; it has become a taken-for-granted activity, a personal tradition. That indicates the volunteer role has been fully institutionalized in their reality. This isn't to say their passion is gone; rather, it means the action of volunteering no longer always requires a deliberate value calculation or emotional trigger; it's sustained by a stable internalized commitment.

At the same time, continued volunteering is bolstered by positive reinforcement and satisfaction – essentially the rewards that volunteers perceive. One major reward repeatedly cited was seeing the improvement in children (the impact of motivation). Volunteers spoke with pride of children who initially struggled to spell but are now able to read fluently, or former troublemakers who became polite and studious after spending time at Warabal. These success stories are deeply fulfilling. A volunteer (female, 32) provided an illustrative example:

*"There's a boy who used to skip school and couldn't read even at the 3rd grade. He started coming here, we gave him extra attention. He slowly caught up. Now he's reading short stories and goes to school regularly. His mother thanked me with tears. Honestly, that moment, I felt this is worth all my effort."* (Interview with Informant Dewi, 2024).

This account highlights how outcome achievement (turnaround of a struggling child) reinforced the volunteer's resolve. It also shows community feedback ("mother thanked me") as a social reward. Such experiences meet the Three Needs: achievement (the boy's success), affiliation (the emotional connection with the grateful mother and the child), and power/influence (she had a positive influence on the boy's life, an empowering feeling in a good sense). Notably, these kinds of outcomes contribute to the social construction of the volunteers' reality by providing concrete evidence that their role matters. It moves the role from abstract "trying to help" to concrete "we have changed lives," thereby objectifying the notion that literacy activism has tangible community value. This becomes part of the shared knowledge base of the volunteers, they frequently share these success anecdotes with each other, which helps to motivate newcomers and sustain group morale.

### 5.3. Challenges and Perseverance: The "Staying" Dynamics

Alongside motivations and rewards, volunteers faced numerous challenges that tested their commitment. Understanding how they navigated these challenges reveals further aspects of their social world and personal resilience. Common challenges mentioned were: lack of resources, time management, community apathy (especially in early stages), and occasional internal burnout or conflicts. Resource constraints are an ever-present issue. Warabal runs on donations and personal contributions, so there are times when new books or materials cannot be acquired for months, or when

maintenance of the facility becomes difficult. Volunteers sometimes had to be very creative – organizing book donation drives, repurposing old materials, or lobbying local authorities for support.

Warabal's team seems to manage this through a strong support network. In formal volunteer management terms, they practice a form of informal peer supervision and encouragement. We also found that sharing responsibilities helps; tasks are rotated to prevent overburdening individuals. This aligns with McCurley & Lynch's note that unmet expectations or overload can lead to departures. Warabal volunteers actively discuss among themselves to redistribute tasks if someone appears overloaded. For example, during our observation, a senior volunteer suggested a schedule change to give a younger volunteer a break when she started university exams. Such adaptability is crucial for volunteer retention. Time management and competing priorities pose additional challenges. Particularly for younger volunteers, balancing studies or work with volunteering requires sacrifices. Some participants mentioned negotiating with their families for time initially, and a few parents or spouses questioned why the participant spent hours at the library instead of doing paid work or chores.

The established culture emphasized that education and family are priorities; volunteers support each other during such times, maintaining flexibility. This flexibility is essential for retention, especially among youth volunteers who might otherwise drop out if forced to choose. An interesting challenge is the emotional burden of volunteering in a community facing social issues. Additionally, some volunteers mentioned drawing on spiritual or religious values to cope with viewing their work as a form of ibadah (worship/service to God), which provides internal resilience because it transcends immediate results and aligns with their faith (this was more evident in older volunteers' narratives). Internal conflicts or disagreements among volunteers were reportedly rare but did occur, particularly as the group increased in size.

One instance recounted in the focus group was a disagreement about whether to seek corporate sponsorship (one volunteer suggested reaching out to a bank for funding, another worried it would commercialize their grassroots spirit). The volunteers resolved this through open discussion and, interestingly, by deferring to their collective values: they agreed that any support should align with Warabal's mission and not impose conditions that could change their approach. Ultimately, they did accept some outside help (e.g., a donation of books from a bank's CSR program) but on their own terms, ensuring the library's independence. This incident, while minor, demonstrates that the volunteers actively construct and negotiate the "meaning" of their volunteerism, keeping it true to a vision of altruism and community-led action, rather than allowing it to morph into something overly institutional. It reflects an awareness of the social construction of their project; they are cautious about how external influences could reshape the reality they have built. Maintaining narrative control, telling their own story of Warabal, is part of sustaining their motivation. Indeed, storytelling was a notable practice: volunteers often share the history and founding anecdotes with new members, reinforcing collective memory and ethos.

#### *5.4. Impact on Community and Self: "Changing Realities"*

The final theme revolves around the perceived outcomes of literacy activism, both for the community and for the volunteers, and how those outcomes feed back into the social reality of the practice. Volunteers unanimously felt that Warabal had made a significant positive impact on Lebakwangi village. They observed more children reading and doing homework, improvements in school performance, and a general increase in what they termed "minat belajar" (interest in learning) among local youth. One local school teacher (also a part-time volunteer) attested that students who frequented Warabal often became top performers in class, and their example pushed others to take reading more seriously. Community members have also begun to show more support; the volunteer team noted incremental changes such as more parents visiting the library to check on their kids' progress, villagers donating used books, and even the village head including Warabal in the village's official annual report as a point of pride. These are signs of Warabal's integration into the fabric of the community; it has transitioned from a private initiative to a community asset.

Berger and Luckmann would describe this as successful institutionalization at the local level: Warabal's activities, initially novel, are now part of the expected social landscape. Children grow up taking for granted that they have access to a library, representing a significant shift in the village's lifeworld compared to 25 years ago, when such a facility did not exist. From the volunteers' perspective, knowing that they have "made our village better" (as one volunteer expressed) serves as a strong motivator and a source of personal validation. It subtly elevates their social status, although volunteers insisted they do not seek reward or fame, some admitted that it feels good when parents or teachers acknowledge their contributions, or when a previously skeptical neighbor now speaks proudly of Warabal to visitors. Such recognition can be viewed as a form of objectification of their social worth. In the volunteers' social reality, they have constructed a role that is not only self-fulfilling but also publicly valued, reinforcing their identity and encouraging continuity and perhaps inspiring others in the community to join or initiate similar efforts.

Volunteering also impacted the volunteers' personal development and futures. Several younger volunteers indicated that their experience solidified or even altered their career trajectories. Two of the college-aged participants decided to pursue careers in education and library science, respectively, explicitly because volunteering revealed to them their passion and talent in these fields. The role of internalization can actually redirect life paths – the volunteer role became central enough to their identity that it influenced a major life decision (career choice). It also shows how volunteering can uncover latent aspirations, perhaps tied to the functional motive of finding one's calling, and also the identity motive, where one's volunteer role becomes one's professional identity, too. For older volunteers or those not pursuing new careers, personal growth was noted in terms of soft skills and social connections.

Volunteers reported improvements in communication skills, public speaking, organization, empathy, and patience. These are in line with research like Llenares and Deocarís [77], which found that volunteerism improved soft skills in volunteers. Our participants' testimonies corroborate this. For instance, Pak RT (the village official volunteer) noted how volunteering enhanced his leadership skills to mobilize people politely [77]. This cross-pollination of skills demonstrates

that the benefits of volunteerism to volunteers themselves can be far-reaching, even improving their effectiveness in other social roles. Lawton et al. [78] found that volunteering is associated with higher well-being and happiness; in Warabal's case, volunteers often described the work as "addictive in a good way," the joy and satisfaction become something they crave because it improves their own sense of well-being [78]. The meaningfulness and positive social interaction of the activity contribute to personal happiness, supporting the notion of reciprocal benefit. Connecting these outcomes back to theory: The volunteers' experiences reflect what Berger & Luckmann describe as the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society in reality construction. The volunteers set out to change their community (externalization of their ideals), and indeed they have objectively changed it (objectivation in the form of Warabal's presence and community acceptance).

In turn, that changed reality has shaped the volunteers themselves (internalization of new identities, skills, and even life opportunities). It's a dynamic loop as volunteers see the fruit of their actions (children reading, community valuing literacy), the reality of "a literate community" that they helped create becomes part of their own lived reality, reinforcing their commitment and perhaps raising new goals (for example, now some volunteers dream of expanding Warabal or replicating it in nearby villages, showing an evolution of their aspirations as the community norm shifts). This phenomenon can also be seen through Weber's lens of meaningful action leading to social change: individual meaningful acts (like Kiswanti's founding action or each volunteer's teaching sessions) aggregated to a point where they produced a cultural change in the village (higher literacy engagement), which then feeds back into the meaning context for future actions (now a volunteer's action has even greater meaning because it's part of a recognized movement in the village).

Finally, it is important to note that not all impacts are easily measurable, and volunteers are aware of this. They speak of intangible outcomes like "instilling a love of learning" or "shifting mindsets," which are long-term and diffuse. However, by reflecting on these, they assign value to their ongoing efforts beyond immediate outputs. This long-term perspective is likely a factor in their perseverance. It aligns with the idea of volunteering as unpaid work with social value, a perspective echoed by Overgaard [79], who reframed volunteering as a form of labor contributing to society [79]. Warabal volunteers, through their narratives, clearly see their labor as filling a gap that formal institutions haven't and they take pride in that. There's a subtle empowerment in the volunteers' tone when they realize that they, ordinary citizens, can effect change that perhaps the government or formal systems could not.

In a Weberian sense, their value-rational actions (grounded in idealism) have led to results that even an instrumental-rational calculus would admire (an educated cohort of children, a community institution built). This blending of idealism and pragmatism could serve as a model for citizen-driven development efforts. In summary, the results illustrate that the social construction of literacy activists at Warabal is an ongoing, dynamic process. It begins with individual motivations and actions, congeals into a structured practice and identity through communal efforts, and yields changes in both the community and the individuals, which in turn reinforce and redefine the practice. The volunteers negotiate meaning at every step, whether convincing their community that reading matters, convincing themselves to push through challenges, or interpreting the significance of a child's success. Their experiences validate theoretical constructs: they exemplify Weber's categories of meaningful social action, embody the externalization-objectivation-internalization cycle of constructing a new social reality (the norm of volunteering and literacy advocacy in the village), and align with volunteer motivation frameworks that emphasize the importance of personal needs, social ties, and identity in sustaining volunteerism.

Crucially, this study shows that context matters. These volunteers operate in a rural Indonesian Muslim-Javanese culture, where certain values (community cooperation, modesty, religious charity) interplay with the volunteer experience. For example, volunteers often frame their work as *amal* (charity) and invoke *barokah* (blessing) for the community concepts that are culturally resonant and help gain community buy-in. Rural identity also plays a role: there is a sense of pride in proving that a small village can produce accomplished readers and university-goers. In effect, the social construction of literacy activists is tied to the social reconstruction of the village's identity. By integrating the voices of the volunteers with sociological and motivational theories, we see a holistic picture: The literacy activists of Warung Baca Lebakwangi are not just performing tasks; they are enacting values and building a new social reality wherein informal education is embraced and volunteerism is normalized. Their story is one of agency, meaning-making, and shared humanity, demonstrating how empowerment flows both to the community and back to the change agents themselves.

## **6. Conclusion**

This phenomenological study aimed to explore how volunteers at a rural community library in Lebakwangi Village construct and experience their roles as literacy activists. Through in-depth engagement with the Warung Baca Lebakwangi case, the study illuminated the interplay of individual motivation, socio-cultural context, and theoretical frameworks in shaping grassroots literacy activism. Several key conclusions emerged: Firstly, the motivations of literacy activist volunteers are multifaceted and deeply rooted in personal and cultural values. Volunteers are driven by a convergence of altruism, empathy, and community commitment, alongside opportunities for personal growth and social connection. Many were initially motivated by emotionally salient experiences, such as witnessing children's needs or being inspired by the founder's story, as well as internalized values like the belief in education for all. Secondly, sustained volunteer engagement is facilitated by the development of a strong volunteer identity and supportive community dynamics. As volunteers continued their service, many transitioned from being "people who volunteer" to truly seeing themselves as literacy activists integral to the community. This identity formation was nurtured by ongoing positive reinforcement: witnessing the fruits of their labor, such as children's improved literacy and confidence, receiving gratitude and respect from community members, and forging meaningful friendships with fellow volunteers.

Thirdly, the volunteers' actions and narratives demonstrate how grassroots initiatives can transform social realities in rural contexts. Over the course of Warabal's development, a marked change occurred in Lebakwangi's literacy culture and attitudes towards volunteerism. Literacy, once undervalued in daily life, gained prominence; children in the village now grow up with storybooks and library time as part of their upbringing, and reading has become a more common pastime. Likewise, the notion of volunteering, initially met with skepticism by some, has become respected and even admired. Fourthly, theoretical frameworks of volunteer motivation proved applicable and illuminating when contextualized. McCurley and Lynch's models, Join–Stay–Leave, Three Needs, and Agenda for Action, were largely borne out in the experiences of Warabal volunteers, but with nuances. Factors for joining included idealism and personal conviction, staying was reinforced by affiliation and achievement, and leaving was rare due to strong retention dynamics, but would align with typical factors like life changes or fatigue if it occurred.

As a single-case, in-depth qualitative study, this research provides rich detail but is not broadly generalizable in a statistical sense. The context of Lebakwangi village is unique in certain respects (e.g., having a highly charismatic founder figure, a quarter-century timeline, etc.). Future research could adopt a comparative case approach, examining multiple community libraries or literacy volunteer networks across different regions of Indonesia or internationally to identify common patterns and distinct variances. Quantitative studies could also be designed to measure outcomes (such as improvements in literacy rates attributable to community libraries) and correlate them with volunteer input metrics, which would complement this study's qualitative insights.

## References

- [1] OECD, *Results*. Pisa: OECD, 2022.
- [2] T. K. Yuda and S. Kühner, "Bringing Indonesia into the global welfare regime debate: A literature review and future research agenda," *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 103-114, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12275>
- [3] S. Gandhawangi, *horses and bemo library to foster a love of reading*. Jakarta: Kompas.com, 2022.
- [4] S. Nurhasanah, M. Najib, and R. Ruknan, "The influence of literacy culture on reading interest of elementary school students," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education, Humanities, and Social Science (ICEHoS 2022) (Vol. 1, pp. 403–409)*. Atlantis Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-088>
- [5] N. Celesta, *Kiswanti's Struggle: Breaking the stigma, women don't need school*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Detik.com, 2022.
- [6] R. Abu, M. Grace, and M. Carroll, "The role of the rural public library in community development and empowerment," *International Journal of the Book*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 63-74, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9516/cgp/v08i02/36863>
- [7] A. Bouaamri, "The roles of public libraries in enhancing educational systems and social inclusion in Africa," *Prospects*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 467-473, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1125-023-09670-9>
- [8] B. Casselden, A. Pickard, G. Walton, and J. McLeod, "Keeping the doors open in an age of austerity? Qualitative analysis of stakeholder views on volunteers in public libraries," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 869-883, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000617743087>
- [9] B. Casselden, A. J. Pickard, and J. McLeod, "The challenges facing public libraries in the Big Society: The role of volunteers, and the issues that surround their use in England," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 187-203, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000613518820>
- [10] D. White, "The rural library project: Building libraries, building community," *Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 108-120, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2014.910721>
- [11] P. Auckloo, "Volunteering to combat illiteracy: using a whole school approach. The case of the prevocational sector," *Travaux & documents*, no. 38, pp. 43--61, 2011.
- [12] K. Dempsey-Brench and A. Shantz, "Skills-based volunteering: A systematic literature review of the intersection of skills and employee volunteering," *Human Resource Management Review*, vol. 32, no. 4, p. 100874, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100874>
- [13] R. W. Shah, "Collaborative imagination: Earning activism through literacy education," *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 104-109, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1353/clj.2017.0016>
- [14] P. W. Hollander and J. B. Hollander, "Activist literacy in shrinking cities: Lessons for urban education," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, vol. 24, no. 1, p. 9, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149x.1104>
- [15] Z. T. D. Andini, "Community library literacy movement a phenomenological study of the construction of the meaning of literacy for street library literacy activists in Malang city," Universitas Brawijaya, 2019.
- [16] M. M. Ncube, "Public libraries and national development plans: A case of Gweru public libraries on the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset)," *International Journal of Sustainable Society*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 346-357, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSSOC.2017.090522>
- [17] I. F. Priyanto, A. Wibawa, and S. Indarwati, "Community engagement through public library social inclusion: the view and practice of librarians in Gunungkidul county, Yogyakarta, Indonesia," in *How Public Libraries Build Sustainable Communities in the 21st Century*: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023, pp. 57-72.
- [18] B. Netelenbos, "Bringing back Max Weber into network governance research," *Critical Policy Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 67-85, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2018.1523738>
- [19] B. Prosch, "Max weber, action, and sociological explanations: methodological individualism in sociology," *Auc Philosophica Et Historica*, vol. 2004, no. 1, pp. 31-38, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.14712/24647055.2018.21>
- [20] L. D. Putri, C. Nugroho, A. Malik, and M. Nastain, "Developing ecological piety in pesantren: The Kyai's cognition and the practice of living fiqh al-bī'ah in Banten," *Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 235-259, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v23i2.235-259>
- [21] P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.
- [22] H. Paul, "Historicizing a classic: Berger and Luckmann's the social construction of reality," *History of Social Science*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 126-144, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ssc.00005>

- [23] S. McCurley and R. Lynch, *Volunteer management: Mobilizing all the resources of the community*, 3rd ed. New York, London: Interpub Group, 2011.
- [24] P. Benevene, I. Buonomo, and M. West, "The relationship between leadership behaviors and volunteer commitment: The role of volunteer satisfaction," *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 11, p. 602466, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.602466>
- [25] S. Burke, E. Rubenstein, N. Lenstra, and C. D'Arpa, "Community health ecosystems and rural public libraries: A model," *Public Library Quarterly*, pp. 1-22, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2025.2458375>
- [26] Y. J. Jung, *A small library making big changes: A case study of the Baramsup Library*. In K. C. Williams-Cockfield & B. Mehra (Eds.), *How public libraries build sustainable communities in the 21st century*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023.
- [27] S. K. Rafie, R. Abu, and R. Hisham, "Rural library sustainability development: A case study in Langkawi," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 12, pp. 296-308, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbs/v10-i12/8107>
- [28] P. Hider, S. Wakeling, A. Marshall, and J. Garner, "Public library services in rural Australia: Challenges and prospects," *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 122-147, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2024.2315338>
- [29] J. Dolan and A. Khan, "The more they change, the more they stay the same: Public libraries and social inclusion," *Libraries in Society: Role, Responsibility and Future in an Age of Change*, pp. 81-99, 2011.
- [30] V. Egli, M. Oliver, and E.-S. Tautolo, "The development of a model of community garden benefits to wellbeing," *Preventive Medicine Reports*, vol. 3, pp. 348-352, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.04.005>
- [31] G. Ika Sari, S. Winasis, I. Pratiwi, U. Wildan Nuryanto, and Basrowi, "Strengthening digital literacy in Indonesia: Collaboration, innovation, and sustainability education," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, vol. 10, p. 101100, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101100>
- [32] A. Marwan, R. H. Harahap, H. R. Humaizi, and H. Ridho, "Local literacy initiatives program as a means of improving communities' literacy in Indonesia," *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 156-170, 2024.
- [33] R. N. Wahyuni, P. Y. Fauziah, S. Aisyah, and M. Y. Al-Fayed, "Implementation of the TBM rumah asa program as a form of creative-innovative education based on entrepreneurship and local wisdom in Yogyakarta City," *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 815-824, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v15i2.3023>
- [34] T. Cahyani and M. F. Wicaksono, "The role of rural library in community empowerment (Leshutama library case study)," *Library Philosophy and Practice*, vol. 6250, pp. 1-14, 2021.
- [35] A. S. Rohman, A. Dewi, and R. Rohanda, "Community literacy movement of Sumedang regency," *Shaut Al-Maktabah: Jurnal Perpustakaan, Arsip dan Dokumentasi*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 30-40, 2019.
- [36] G. Karlin and H. S. Kang, "Refugee learning center in indonesia: A habitat for refugee well-being in transit," *European Journal of Education*, vol. 60, no. 1, p. e12926, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12926>
- [37] I. Ali, *Public library development policy in Indonesia: The present and the future*. In E. Abbott-Halpin & R. C. Berlin (Eds.), *Public library governance: International perspectives*. Boston: De Gruyter Saur, 2020.
- [38] S. A. Munshi, M. A. Ansari, and S. Barsha, "Rural libraries as providers of life-long learning opportunities: An appraisal of information services and facilities in West Bengal," *Libri*, vol. 74, no. 1, pp. 1-14, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2023-0050>
- [39] M. J. Mamabolo and O. O. Durodolu, "Rural accessibility to digital libraries: Requirements and challenges," *Digital Library Perspectives*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 551-570, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLP-04-2023-0025>
- [40] J. Bossaller, C. Starkey, and K. Root Quayle, "Cultivating community: How rural libraries are growing health and wellness through gardens," *Public Library Quarterly*, pp. 1-19, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2025.2500272>
- [41] K. Yustisia, D. Lintang, and E. Salsabila, "Students' perceptions on the use of mentimeter media in learning to write descriptive text," *EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka): Culture, Language, and Teaching of English*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 90-105, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.26905/enjourme.v8i1.10646>
- [42] K. Kine and A. Davidstone, "Latvian public libraries as a resource, cooperation partner and initiator for promoting media literacy and civic participation in local communities," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 640-651, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211036736>
- [43] S. Yari and M. A. Bahrami, "The role of rural public libraries in empowering and developing the rural community," *Research on Information Science and Public Libraries*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 140-156, 2024.
- [44] M. Weber, *The nature of social action*, in *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, M. Weber, W. G. Runciman, and E. Matthews, Eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- [45] F. Minner, "Rationality, normativity, and emotions: An assessment of Max Weber's typology of social action," *Perspectives Weberiennes en Philosophie*, vol. 54, pp. 327-357, 2020.
- [46] L. Alex, *Social action*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011. 173-176
- [47] S. Raza, "Max weber and charles taylor: On normative aspects of a theory of human action," *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 97-136, 2023. [10.1177/1468795x221080770](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795x221080770)
- [48] M. Strand and O. Lizardo, "Chance, orientation, and interpretation: Max weber's neglected probabilism and the future of social theory," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 124-150, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07352751221084712>
- [49] J. Fakhrurozi, D. Suganda, L. Meilinawati Rahayu, and N. Darmayanti, "Construction of Islamic identity in the Lampung community leadership system through folk poetry," *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 2451494, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2451494>
- [50] J. K. McDonald, K. Bowman, and S. Elsayed-Ali, "Objectivation in design team conversation," *Design Studies*, vol. 77, p. 101045, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2021.101045>
- [51] M. A. K. Al Hourani, "Covid-19 and the social construction of reality in jordan: Taking peter berger and thomas luckmann to the realm of social power," *Comparative Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 718-740, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-bja10045>
- [52] A. Demartoto, S. , Y., B. Haryono, and A. A. Mundayat, "Community's social construction on Covid-19 patients with supervision in Surakarta, Indonesia," presented at the E3S Web of Conferences, 202, 07011. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202020207011>, 2020.



- [53] I. Kanafi, H. Dahri, S. Susminingsih, and S. Bakhri, "The contribution of Ahlussunnah Waljamaah's theology in establishing moderate Islam in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, vol. 77, no. 4, pp. 1-10, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6437>
- [54] A. Curtin, "Understanding literacy as human practice: Exploring stories about (people like) us," *Education 3-13*, vol. 52, no. 7, pp. 1006-1018, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2024.2357883>
- [55] R. D. Johnson, J. J. Araujo, and N. Cossa, "Literacy: The critical role of teacher knowledge. the thirty-ninth yearbook: A double peer-reviewed publication of the association of literacy educators and researchers," *Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers*, 2017.
- [56] S. Harrow, M. Leggett, S. Robertson, L. Townsend, and S. Daviduik, *Building capacity to attract and retain literacy volunteers*. Ontario: Knowledge Development Centre, 2005.
- [57] D. Sriandina, R. K. Anwar, and A. S. Rohman, "The role of Jatmika Reading House volunteers in instilling children's environmental literacy," *Jurnal Kajian Informasi & Perpustakaan*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 169-182, 2024. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24198/jkip.v12i2.55170>
- [58] J.-W. Wang et al., "Applying the social cognitive perspective to volunteer intention in China: the mediating roles of self-efficacy and motivation," *Health Promotion International*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 177-187, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daq056>
- [59] H. L. Low, C. S. Goh, H. S. Teh, and T. S. Aini, "Perception of studying mandarin from home: An analysis from mclelland's theory," *JURNAL ARBITRER*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 82-95, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.25077/ar.12.1.82-95.2025>
- [60] D. C. McClelland, "How motives, skills, and values determine what people do," *American Psychologist*, vol. 40, no. 7, p. 812, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.40.7.812>
- [61] M. A. Y. D. Madurapperuma and K.-m. Kim, "Sustaining business: A psychological perspective of donation behavior," *Sustainability*, vol. 12, no. 22, p. 9355, 2020.
- [62] K. Breen, M. A. Meyer, S. Becker, J. C. Purdum, and S. Nolan, "Volunteer motivations in civilian volunteer search and rescue organizations," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, vol. 111, p. 104688, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2024.104688>
- [63] A. Colibaba, M. W. Skinner, and E. Russell, "Rural aging during COVID-19: A case study of older voluntarism," *Canadian Journal on Aging*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 581-590, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980821000386>
- [64] A. Colibaba, M. W. Skinner, and C. Furgal, "The challenges and opportunities of sustaining volunteer-based rural libraries," *Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 410-427, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1576117>
- [65] S. Clancy, K. Harman, and I. Jones, "Special issue on lived experience, learning, community activism and social change," *Studies in Adult Education*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 123-127, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2022.2105551>
- [66] J. W. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2016.
- [67] C. Nugroho, "The movement of bali reject reclamation (the phenomenological study of balinese society movement rejects benoa bay reclamation among# forbali alliances)," *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 21-29, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.14421/pjk.v12i1.1541>
- [68] T. Hjelm, "Rethinking the theoretical base of Peter L. Berger's sociology of religion: Social construction, power, and discourse," *Critical Research on Religion*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 223-236, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303219874392>
- [69] M. Ankers, Y. Parry, and E. Willis, "Social constructionism, power, and understanding the health needs of different groups engaged in a shared reality," in *Handbook of Social Sciences and Global Public Health*. Cham: Springer, 2023, pp. 603-617.
- [70] E. Kuswarno, *Phenomenology of communication research methods: Conceptions, guidelines, and research examples*. Bandung: Widya Padjadjaran, 2009.
- [71] T. Hedges and S. De Biasio, "Discriminatory types and homogenising relevances: A schutzian perspective on oppression," *Human Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 727-748, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-024-09725-6>
- [72] R. A. Randez, "Using the listening guide method for short story construction: Redefining researcher and participant through immanence," *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 100057, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2023.100057>
- [73] S. Wang, J. M. Ramdani, S. Sun, P. Bose, and X. Gao, "Naming research participants in qualitative language learning research: Numbers, pseudonyms, or real names?," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, pp. 1-14, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2298737>
- [74] J. A. Grube and J. A. Piliavin, "Role Identity, organizational experiences, and volunteer performance," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 26, no. 9, pp. 1108-1119, 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672002611007>
- [75] M. J. Gill, "Understanding the spread of sustained employee volunteering: How volunteers influence their coworkers' moral identity work," *Journal of Management*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 677-708, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063211050879>
- [76] M. G. L. Wui and E. N. P. Leviste, "Weber, education, and the rise of modern societies," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Thinkers*. Cham: Springer, 2023, pp. 1-14.
- [77] I. I. Llenares and C. C. Deocaris, "Volunteerism Is associated with improved soft skills of marine engineering students in the Philippines," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 57-73, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.vi0.1152>
- [78] R. N. Lawton, I. Gramatki, W. Watt, and D. Fujiwara, "Does volunteering make us happier, or are happier people more likely to volunteer? Addressing the problem of reverse causality when estimating the wellbeing impacts of volunteering," *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 599-624, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00242-8>
- [79] C. Overgaard, "Rethinking volunteering as a form of unpaid work," *Nonprofit and Voluntary sector Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 128-145, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764018809419>