

Communication Behaviour: A Struggle Against Illiteracy in Eastern Indonesia

Zaia Ramallah^{a*}, Dadang Rahmat Hidayat^b, Anter Venus^c, Agus Rahmat^d, ^aLecturer of Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Ph.D Student of Communication Science, Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia, ^{b,c,d}Lecturer of Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia, E-mail ^{a*}zaia.ramallah@lecturer.umn.ac.id, zaia16001@mail.unpad.ac.id

The illiteracy phenomenon is a trial that requires effort in order to defeat it. The children of Kadi Wone village, East Wewewa District, Southwest Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia attempt to defeat this phenomenon by engaging in their education and studying. However as this is deemed insufficient, children may choose to join a reading centre (Taman Bacaan Masyarakat) called Dyatame. The social circle of Dyatame reading centre provides an opportunity to enhance interest in reading and learning. The purpose of this study was to reveal the meaning of reading in terms of it being a resource to fight illiteracy and further, to study the communication behaviour created through interactions in the social circle of Dyatame reading centre. The results of this study reveal that children can be empowered with learning spirit in the fight against illiteracy. This motivation can also build their capacity through an understanding of the meaning of reading, as a source of insight and an information tool. This study also envisages that this learning process can shape communication behaviour, verbally and non-verbally in both positive and negative ways.

Key words: *Communication; children; fight illiteracy; Indonesia .*

Background

Eastern Indonesia has always been a government development priority in the National Republic of Indonesia. There are complex issues occurring in Eastern Indonesia, due to deeply rooted problems, which are in dire need of solution. One of these problems is education which is a fundamental need in modern life. It has been observed that the bare minimum facility and infrastructure of education has been worsened by low levels of societal awareness. The low level of education coupled with a high illiteracy rate in Eastern Indonesian has further impacted

the implications. Illiteracy and consequent low education levels are not only the responsibility of the government; society must also contribute and work collaboratively with government to combat this phenomenon.

The Ministry of Culture and Education data shows that there are eleven provinces with an illiteracy rate above the national figure, including Papua 28.75 percent, West Nusa Tenggara 7.91 percent, East Nusa Tenggara 5.15, and West Sulawesi 4,58 percent (Timex, 2017). Meanwhile, Pustaka Bergerak, collaborating with Pos Indonesia Company, has recorded that there are approximately 301 reading centres in East Nusa Tenggara (PT. Pos Indonesia, 2018). Reading centres have spread in various locales of East Nusa Tenggara and are intended to provide facilities to improve the quality of education, reduce the illiteracy rate and cultivate a reading culture. According to Irkham (2012: 62), however, reading culture is yet to become an embedded, intricate part of a person's daily life. There are several reading centres in East Nusa Tenggara, but only a few have the capacity to survive and develop reading culture among the masses.

One of these reading centres is Dyatame Reading Centre. For a public reading centre to be deemed as a source of information, it can be determined from two aspects, firstly the amount of resources available and secondly, the nature of service provided (Saepudin, Sukaesih, & Rusmana, 2017). What makes Dyatame unique is not only the fact that it has become a forum for reading activities but that it also provides learning activities with scheduled sessions. Although Dyatame has existed for less than a year, its membership and exposure have grown in number and members and visitors come regularly to attend its organized activities.

Children with a high interest in learning attend the centre, not only travelling from Dyatame's surrounding social environment but also from other neighboring villages, like Mareda Kalada, Kadi Wone, Pada Eweta, and Maliti Ndari. All of these villages are located in the district of East Wewewa, Southwest Sumba Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The farthest village of Dyatame is Kadi Wone, and for ± 2 km, children with a high spirit of learning and the will to fight against illiteracy, travel to attend the centre. The relative distance to travel does not thwart their spirit to study together with their friends. There are 120 children who regularly participate in Dyatame's learning sessions. In fact, Dyatame learning centre is a private local community initiative. It is characterized as a social activity initiated by a concern about the region's children: their potential future and also their social environment. Every child with a willingness to learn at the Dyatame reading centre can attend the house of Emprani, the initiator, for free. This facility is made available in her simple family living room.

The children here come to build their social life through an interest in learning. They are aware that if the next generation is raised with a learning spirit from an early stage, illiteracy rates can be very quickly reduced. Dyatame reading centre organizes learning sessions every Monday



for teenagers of junior and senior high schools. Tuesday is reserved for children of elementary school while Wednesday is designated for children and teenagers from elementary school and all levels of high school. Learning activities occur during the hours of 5:00 and 7:00 pm East Indonesian Time. Extra activities are held every Saturday, consisting of simple science experiments. There are also some children who actively participate in the vocal group “Betesda” at the church of GKS Pusat Mondo Mia. Moreover, Dyatame’s activities are based on fun learning, for example, English lessons are delivered through Western songs that are familiar to the children. The reading materials are also delivered in melodic tones so that children feel comfortable and happy— and it is believed that they remember better this way.

This study is based on the premise that illiteracy is closely entwined with reading activity, which in time, shapes the habit of reading. The learning process happening in Dyatame study group cannot be detached from a reading activity. It is also designed to take advantage, as much as possible, of books received via donation by the Indonesian people.

Literature Review

Learning activity is defined as different from communication as the latter happens only in a certain background and environment. Communication also has its own purpose, although sometimes this is achieved unintentionally and formulated in rather poor fashion. Basically, it is inevitable that communication should always have a certain purpose. According to Iriantara (2014), the purpose of communication is to inform, entertain, educate or influence. However, there are also other purposes such as identity development or escape from routine or a boring reality.

Several studies on communication with regard to the cultivation of reading and learning culture are available. Sarumaha (2013), for instance, examines the role of friendship between students and teachers to elicit whether attention and happiness can improve learning spirit and create changes in attitude and motivation for learning. The study also points out that an enthusiastic attitude and the habit to actively join discussion and participate in competition, both outside and inside a study group, can indicate a high learning interest. It also asserts that the role of communication in a study group influences attitude, affecting the behaviour of each individual member.

Weheba and Kader (2007) investigated the effect of communication on teaching. The study found that communication can evoke interest and develop the ability to understand diverse perspectives and thus create a fun atmosphere. Communication in learning helps students attain a point of view for their lives, making them apply what they learn from activities.



Communication can affect their behaviour, intentionally and unintentionally, in both positive and negative ways.

Communication also takes place only in a certain environment and context, in a formal or informal setting, in a certain time and space. Human communication particularly takes place in the environment of a study group. In a day-to-day setting, much interaction and communication happen at interpersonal levels. This develops competence in interpersonal communication and increases knowledge, skill, and motivation. In the context of learning, especially informal learning, Iriantara (2013) states: “this competence development of interpersonal communication is crucial because: (1) a major part of learning often happens in classrooms in informal ways; (2) most crucial learning experiences take place in informal learning and (3) most interpersonal communication competence appears correct and motivational, especially when the interpersonal communication of learning takes place.”

Communication has instrumental functions too, when it takes place with the purpose to inform, educate, push, change attitude belief and behaviour, or drive actions. Communication taking place in the learning processes of Dyatame study group has a promise to achieve the expected goal, which is to influence children’s behaviour in order to cultivate literacy. Thus, this study aims to learn and analyze such communication behaviours of children in Dyatame study group within the learning processes to find out how the learning processes carried out at Dyatame persuade and drive the children to become agents of change in the fight against illiteracy

Methodology

Understanding about communication behaviour in this study was achieved by using the single case study method. With respect to communication behaviours of children who actively participate in the activities of Dyatame study group seen as a single case study. Mulyana (2005: 201) defines a case study as “a comprehensive elaboration and exposition about various aspects of an individual, a group, an organization (community), a program, or a social situation.” Case study also constitutes a limited exploration, such as how to explore communication that happens in a social environment such as Dyatame study group. This is consistent with Creswell’s statement (1998:), “A case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (multiple cases) over time.” Moreover, case studies try to examine as much data as they can about the subject under study. In qualitative research, the instrument of a case based study is the researcher, as pointed out by Sugiyono explains (2011 : 102) “ the instrument of research is one that is used to measure a natural or social phenomenon being observed”. By studying an individual, a group, or an event as much as possible, a researcher can provide a complete and profound perspective on a subject.

A case study, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), is a qualitative approach that allows a researcher to provide a comprehensive explanation about a certain phenomenon, and is not only limited to a generalization about the said phenomenon. When employing a qualitative approach, research can also study a symbolic interaction between humans in its various forms and contexts. The determination of the case study method is based on Narendra's opinion (2008: 83) which claims that case based research is specifically unique due to: (1) its natural context, in this study, communication behaviour as illustrated from the learning processes at Dyatame study group; (2) its physical environment, in this study, the specific setting or the social environment of Dyatame study group which includes four villages from one district; (3) its social aspect, which involves the social life of Dyatame's environment as influenced by the social norms and values prevailing in the society.

Findings, Results and Discussion

The existence of Dyatame study group constitutes a real step towards change in the societal environment. Dyatame study group conducts all its activities in a study room of 6 x 3 meters in Empriani's, the initiator of Dyatame study group, house. The use of the study room, also a living room of Empriani's house, speaks about her concern for the future of the village children. Across a time span of one year, 120 children have regularly participated in the learning activities at Dyatame. These children, in fact, are prepared to become fighters against illiteracy. The learning processes at Dyatame study group, where children share knowledge in group communications, aims to fight against illiteracy, Reading activities are carried out to improve literacy at Dyatame. Every Wednesday children from all levels of education gather, elementary, junior high and senior high school. One child reads while the others respond by asking questions.

The study further revealed that children who are the most spirited fighters come from Kadi Wone, the farthest villages from the Dyatame study group. These children never fail to show their high spirit and in fact, seem to long for activities at Dyatame. These child illiteracy fighters often have to walk an approximate two kilometer distance to reach the Dyatame reading centre. Along the way, paddy fields stretch on the left and right side of the road and when going home from Dyatame, these children need to walk in the darkness of the night as there are no street lights yet they never act dispirited and always seem happy.

This is certainly a unique phenomenon worthy of highlight and must be replicated by other children of their village and other remote localities in Indonesia. This is good evidence to show how children can develop the spirit to learn and commit to a small movement that fights against illiteracy. While many policy makers are concerned about the deteriorating conditions of Eastern Indonesian in terms of development and progress, a private reading centre such as



Dyatame is making a great contribution to the field of education. This can be seen as a social initiative to evoke the spirit of village children to learn and improve literacy.

i. Love Of Reading Among Children Fighters To Defeat Illiteracy

Social reading centres normally make themselves a hotspot of literacy activities. The Dyatame reading centre however is different as it optimizes reading through studying together. Studying at Dyatame is a method to inculcate the value of reading among children. Since there is a social concern over the high rate of illiteracy, the reason behind studying together is also to fight this social evil. Reading activity has many benefits for children, both in the present and the future. Through reading, children will obtain information and inspiration. According to Masri (2008: 7), there are many benefits obtained from reading such as added vocabulary, improved communication skills, new concepts, practice in logical thinking and concentration and development of imagination and creativity, all which open new horizons, prepare for life and enhance academic achievements. These benefits apply differently to each individual as they have different meanings for each participant also.

There are several other activities that can be attempted to push children's reading interest, according to Prasetyo (2008: 58). These activities include using books with drawings (such as comic books), making the environment a fun place to read, choosing materials that children love yet still educational, and adding collections. These measures can be accomplished by the parents at home and through reading centres like Dyatame.

There are several views to understand the social environment created by the Dyatame reading centre. According to one view of symbolic interaction, a social activity like studying or reading and the plan of that activity cannot be isolated from the other. West and Turner (2013) suggest that symbolic interaction is based on ideas about self and its relationship with society. Ideas appearing about the self will build a meaning in each individual's life. Moreover, symbolic interaction according to LaRossa & Reitzes (1993) is a referential framework to understand how humans together with others to create a symbolic world and how in turn such world shape human behaviour. This theory explores the relationship between the self and the society in which one lives (West & Turner, 2013). Further, in his scientific paper, Effendie (2013:70) opines that this theory relates to individuals, interaction and interpretations, which are key terminologies in understanding social life.

The children at Dyatame study centre are seen interacting and interpreting themselves in order to understand and give meaning to their activities. Meaning is obtained by individuals by way of interactions. An activity will have a meaning if an individual completes it through interaction with others, and this serves as a reference to develop an attitude (Morissan, 2013: 112). Hence, the meanings of reading as carried out by children at Dyatame are a road to success for their



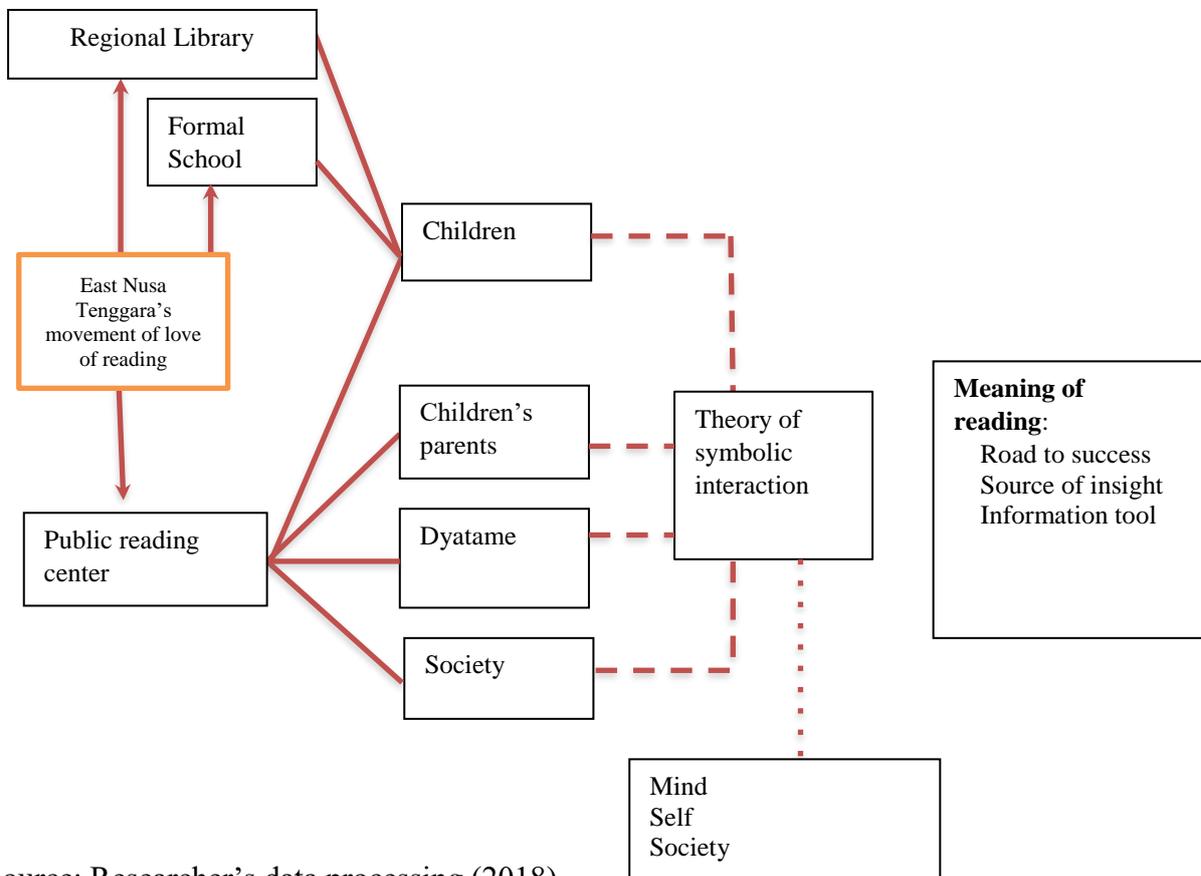
future, as well as a source of knowledge, and an informational tool. Reading can be a path that leads future success and according to Kuhn in Morissan (2013: 111), the importance of object naming is to convey the meaning of such objects, just as understanding with regard to reading is the most important object in life. During the course of this study several statements were recorded from interviews with correspondents and other participants. A few examples from the results can be cited as below:

“Reading can give information, I am ready because I want to, with reading I can obtain knowledge that makes me smart and successful later on.” (Results of interviews with correspondent Zarah, Saturday 7 April 2018)

Another correspondent stated: “Reading is good so one can know information, it’s not difficult.” (Correspondent Umbu, Saturday 7 April 2018). Likewise, another commented: “By reading we can succeed, we can get information easily. The importance of reading in everyday life, so if that is fluent, you can read the lesson directly.” (Correspondent Joshua, Tuesday 10 April 2018)

Morissan (2013: 112) explains how an individual should create the meaning of an object: “when someone makes a decision about how to behave toward an object, he/she creates what Kuhn calls ‘a plan of action’, combined with attitude or verbal statement that shows values at which the attitude is directed.” Thus the meaning of an object appears on the grounds of interactions created from the social environment. To explain this process of an objective meaning management and how it is supported by an individual, assisted by social interactions, the researchers designed a model depicted in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Model of reading of meaning



Source: Researcher's data processing (2018)

The above figure represents how a movement to cultivate the love of reading can be initiated by various parties, whether a government or a private institution. This movement can be accomplished by many individuals, whether at departmental level, like a regional library, or in a formal school. Further, there are also private initiatives to set up public reading school as a social activity with a more narrow scope, spread throughout villages. There are several public reading centres that affect people more strongly than efforts made by government departments.

For instance, a reading centre at formal schools operates as an education institution in which every day before learning activities begin, reading is compulsory for 15 minutes. This obligatory habituation of reading is based on the ministerial decree of the Ministry of Culture and Education, Permendikbud, no. 23 the year of 2015. Secondly, a library is a facility that provides adequate and proper reading material. Ironically, according to Kamil (2003: 3), "Proper public libraries can only be found in big cities." There is an existing gap between major city libraries and regional libraries in terms of facility and management etc. As for public



reading centres, these are private initiatives of individuals or non-governmental organizations that complete or supplement schools and libraries.

There are many public reading centres whose activities are only regular book borrowing or introducing books for children to evoke their reading interest. These public reading centres also organize informal learning activities, similar to what is carried out by the Dyatame study group. Apart from book borrowing, there are also learning activities or free lessons, with subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science taught. As well as learning activities, these public reading centres are also engaged in play and fun activities and teach art subjects such as drawing, singing, or counting. Finally, the activities initiated by Dyatame study group are social and obviously establish social relations. Hence, there should be more such social organizations that could develop social relations through interactions. These organizations must initiate the process of communication and help children fight against illiteracy. They can initiate learning activities such as those at Dyatame to build interactions and find their own meanings.

ii. Communication Behaviour To Fight Against Illiteracy

Dyatame study group was initiated by a young woman from Mareda Kalada village who has considerable concern for the development of children's education. According to Stian Haklev (2008: 21), the evolution of a public reading centre from development through to implementation is dependant on a movement by young people who are motivated and who are highly concerned about a social cause. Further, such motivation and high concern must be communicated to their target, in this case the youth facing illiteracy.

The communication at Dyatame study group is accomplished through a learning process between children and Dyatame management, between children and teachers, between children and parents, between children and neighbors. Such communication affects their progress and setbacks. These processes also hint at the way children socialize and participate in the activities at Dyatame study group. Through learning activities and playing together, Dyatame channels the spirit of reading among the children and builds comfort and sense of fun in the learning process through togetherness, creating a vibrant and engaging reading environment.

Interactions happening in children's lives shape their communication behavior and necessitate the participation of the surrounding society including local figures, village officials, and especially educators. The existence of a conducive education environment for social activity in establishing norms for these behaviours is a benefit of the Dyatame study group context. Verbal and non-verbal forms of communication are accomplished through learning activities which affect literacy behaviours. Moreover, children's ability to engage in persuasive communication to spread the learning spirit in Dyatame study group becomes effective since they are the perpetrators or sources of the said communication process. It is the children who know and

have the immediate experience about learning activities at Dyatame and hence they have the opportunity to develop effective persuasive communication. The process of learning in a social environment at Dyatame study group also shapes open communications which in turn influences the communication behaviour.

Children should be educated in a manner that encourages them to communicate. This will facilitate understanding about what the intention of educators, although a few children sometimes pretend not to understand in order to get more attention. When good communication is underway, it creates a positive impact on children and their continued interest in the learning processes, something that is a key component at the Dyatame study group. A history of poor or negative communication can result in reluctance to return and or to study. This is a subjective experience that one has, according to social action theory, in which one's action represents others'. Table 1 below exhibits such kinds of communication behaviour. The table shows that verbal communication is developed through support or motivation while non-verbal behavior can even develop with a smile. Verbally, the negative communication behaviour is seen as inhibition while nonverbal is glowering and pinching.

Table 1: Communication Behaviour

	Positive communication behaviour	Negative communication behaviour
Verbal	Support	Inhibition
Non-verbal	Smile	Pinching, glowering

Source: Researcher's data processing (2018)

This proves that human behaviour is based on meanings and motifs of individuals who are engaged in social interactions in their daily life. Also, that communication is an event like a behaviour or any other action. An experienced communication event is also called communication behaviour. Communication behaviour in a human's life is influenced by many factors such as attitude and environment. The communication behaviour shaped by children at Dyatame is an attitude or action that they obtain from social interactions. Their activities shape their behaviours which are supported by other factors such as their personal environment. Children can be naughty, garrulous, interested in actively posing questions or telling stories and all such behaviours must be responded to wisely, using effective communication as potentially, communication behaviours can harm children's confidence and achievement among their friends.

However, in a social environment, people engage in inappropriate communication by imposing inhibitions or even engaging in verbal or non-verbal abuse, which in children can be such behaviours as glowering or even pinching or hitting when they are angry. The fact is even if what children do is bad, an adult should be able to communicate well with them so that they



can accept a message without feeling repressed or forced as this would only scare them, while the contrary could make them happy. So, an established communication can have a positive or negative value that affects a child's behaviour. Further, a mistake in communication can influence a child's personality in the long term, impacting on their actions into adulthood. Verbal and non-verbal communication can control others' behaviour through language where ordinary non-verbal language is used to clarify verbal language when communication is underway. Therefore, verbal and non-verbal communication can be seen as a process of message delivery effected in different forms of communication delivered by adults to children with special needs.

Conclusion

Dyatame study group has become a forum for village children to grow, develop a learning spirit, and read. If the younger generation is well educated and has a high spirit to study, illiteracy will not be such a frightening specter in the future for Eastern Indonesia. Illiteracy, a phenomenon that becomes a limitation and a seed of oppression can be eradicated. In future, the impact of a child's struggle to achieve literacy, will bear fruit in improved further education access and success. The learning process also shapes communication behaviours, both positive and negative, and verbally and non-verbally where positive communication behaviour includes support and motivation which uses non-verbal cues like a smile and on the contrary, negative verbal communication behaviour is inhibitive and includes non-verbal cues such as glowering and pinching. From the perspective of communication, this type of learning will create a momentum that impacts many children as they learn, through learning activities that develop their interest in reading and effectively fight illiteracy in Eastern Indonesia.



REFERENCES

- Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. *Qualitative Health Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00177>
- Effendie, I. N. (2013). Hubungan Pertemanan pada Komunitas Miskin Perkotaan. *Jurnal Communication*, 4(1), 70.
- Haklev, S. (2008). *Educating the Nation: A Question of the Taman Bacaan Phenomenon in Indonesia*. University of Toronto.
- Indonesia, P. P. (2018). Daftar Simpul PBI. Retrieved August 25, 2018, from <http://www.posindonesia.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Alamat-PB-15-Agustus-2018.pdf>
- Iriantara, Y. (2013). *Komunikasi Pendidikan*. Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.
- Iriantara, Y. (2014). *Komunikasi Pembelajaran*. Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.
- Irkham, A. and G. (2012). *Gempa Literasi: Dari Kampung Untuk Nusantara*. PT. Gramedia.
- Kamil, H. (2003). The Growth of Community-based Library Services in Indonesia to Support Education. In *World Library and Information Congress : 69th IFLA General Conference and Council*.
- LaRossa, R., & Reitzes, D. C. (1993). Symbolic Interactionism and Family Studies. *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>
- Lindlof, T.R., & Taylor, B. . (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods (3rd ed.)*. Sage.
- Morissan. (2013). *Teori Komunikasi Individu Hingga Massa*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group.
- Mulyana, D. (2005). *Metode Penelitian Komunikasi: Contoh-contoh Penelitian Kualitatif Dengan Pendekatan Praktis*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Narendra, P. (2008). *Metodologi Riset Komunikasi*. Yogyakarta: Balai Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Informasi Pusat Kajian Media dan Budaya Populer.
- Prasetyo, D. S. (2008). *Rahasia Mengajarkan Gemar Membaca Pada Anak Sejak Dini*. Yogyakarta: Think.



- R Masri, S. (2008). *Menumbuhkan Minat Baca Sejak Dini*. Jakarta: Indeks.
- Saepudin, E., Sukaesih, & Rusmana, A. (2017). Peran Taman Bacaan Masyarakat (TBM) bagi Anak-Anak Usia Dini. *Kajian Informasi Dan Perpustakaan*, 5(1), 1–12.
- Sarumaha, R. D. (2013). *Peran Komunikasi Kelompok dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar*. Medan.
- Sugiyono. (2011). Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R & D. *Bandung: Alfabeta*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Timex, J. (2017). PENDIDIKAN Angka Buta Aksara di NTT Capai 5,15 Persen. Retrieved March 25, 2018, from <http://timorexpress.fajar.co.id/2017/09/09/angka-buta-aksara-di-ntt-capai-515-persen/>
- Weheba, D. M. and Kader, M. A. (2007). THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING: A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION APPROACH. *AN INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF TOURISM*, 2(1), 127–143. Retrieved from https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/25391/1/MPRA_paper_25391.pdf
- West, R. L., & Turner, L. H. (2013). *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application*. Faculty & Staff Books.