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The Role of Change Leadership in Developing a Local Community-Based Spirit of Literacy in the Cirebon Reading Community

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Abstract: Literacy is an important foundation for human resource development and social development. However, various local literacy communities face sustainability challenges due to limited resources and member participation dynamics. This study aims to analyze the role of change leadership in fostering a spirit of local community-based literacy in the Cirebon Reading Grow Reading Community. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Research informants included community activists, core administrators, and active members. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Its validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results show that change leadership plays a crucial role in building a shared literacy vision, encouraging literacy program adaptation, empowering members, and managing resistance to change. This change leadership impacts increased member participation, consistency of literacy activities, and the formation of collective literacy awareness. This study concludes that change leadership is a key factor in maintaining the sustainability and strengthening of local community-based literacy movements.

Keywords: change leadership; literacy; reading community; community education; community literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy plays a strategic role in building a critical, reflective, and competitive society. In the information age, characterized by the rapid and massive flow of data, literacy is not only related to reading and writing skills but also encompasses the ability to understand, process, and use information responsibly (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Street, 2014). Nevertheless, the literacy rate of the Indonesian people still faces various challenges, particularly in terms of reading interest and the sustainability of literacy activities at the community level. Data from PISA 2022 confirms that Indonesia ranked 71st out of 81 countries in reading literacy, reflecting a systemic challenge in

developing a culture of reading at both individual and societal levels (Pisa, 2023). Research by Prabowo et al., (2025) further confirms that demographic and contextual factors significantly shape reading habits among Indonesian students, highlighting the need for more community-driven literacy initiatives. This challenge is also compounded by limited access to reading materials and insufficient environmental support for sustaining consistent reading habits (Hadianto et al., 2022).

Efforts to improve literacy have largely focused on structural approaches through government policies and formal educational institutions. However, this approach has not fully reached the grassroots level. Therefore, local literacy communities exist as a strategic alternative for fostering a culture of literacy in a participatory and contextual way (Hayat et al., 2024). Reading communities serve not only as reading spaces but also as platforms for social interaction, the exchange of ideas, and the development of collective literacy awareness. The role of community reading centres (CRCs) in improving literacy and community knowledge—by providing open access to reading materials, supporting lifelong learning, and fostering a culture of reading—has been documented in recent Indonesian studies.

Despite their significant potential, many literacy communities face internal challenges, such as low member participation, limited resources, and weak program sustainability. Volunteer-based organizations, such as reading communities, are particularly vulnerable to issues of member retention and organizational identity (Xu et al., 2024). This situation demonstrates that the success of community-based literacy movements depends heavily on the quality of leadership capable of managing change and social dynamics. In this context, change leadership is a relevant leadership approach. Change leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to initiate change, build a shared vision, manage resistance, and encourage member involvement in the transformation process.

Change leadership is not only results-oriented but also empowers and fosters collective learning. Recent scholarship confirms that transformational leadership—a closely related construct—positively shapes organizational change capability through trust-based mechanisms (Cao & PB Le, 2024). In literacy communities, the role of change leaders is crucial in maintaining the spirit of literacy, ensuring its viability and adaptability to social change. Furthermore, Sopow et al., (2025) demonstrated empirically that the communication of an organization's vision and goals is the strongest predictor of successful change management, underscoring the centrality of vision-oriented leadership in any community setting.

The Cirebon Baca Tumbuh Baca Community is a local literacy community actively developing reading activities, discussions, and community literacy mentoring. The sustainability of this community amidst various challenges is interesting to study academically. Therefore, this research focuses on the role of change leadership in fostering a spirit of literacy within the local community within the Cirebon Baca Tumbuh Baca Community.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method, chosen to gain a deeper understanding of change leadership practices and the evolving literacy dynamics within the local community context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This qualitative approach allows researchers to comprehensively explore the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of community members, enabling the change leadership process to be understood as a holistic social phenomenon, rather than simply a quantitative causal relationship (Miles, 2014). The case study design was specifically selected because the Cirebon Reading Grow Reading Community constitutes a bounded, context-specific unit of analysis with distinctive organisational characteristics—including its informal structure, voluntary membership, and demonstrated capacity for sustained literacy programming despite limited institutional support—that align with the defining criteria for purposive case selection in qualitative research (Yin, 2024).

The research was conducted at the Cirebon Community of Reading, Growing, and Reading, a community-based literacy community that actively organizes various reading, discussion, and literacy mentoring activities. The research location was selected based on the sustainability of community activities and the visible leadership role in managing change dynamics and member participation. Research subjects included key community leaders, core administrators, and active members directly involved in implementing literacy activities. Informants were selected purposively, considering their level of involvement, experience, and knowledge of the leadership process and community literacy activities.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation study. In-depth interviews (semi-structured; guided by Fullan, (2011) change leadership framework and Kotter's (2012) eight-step model, covering themes of vision-building, adaptive programme management, member empowerment, and resistance management; [X] key questions; conducted with [X] informants; each session lasting approximately 45–90 minutes; audio-recorded with participant consent) were used to explore informants' perspectives, experiences, and meanings regarding change leadership practices, the literacy program adaptation process, and the growing literacy spirit within the community. Participatory observation was conducted by researchers directly engaging in community activities to observe interactions between members, participation patterns, and the dynamics of literacy activities. Meanwhile, documentation studies were conducted by reviewing various supporting documents, such as activity archives, community social media posts, internal reports, and activity notes relevant to the research focus.

Data analysis was conducted continuously using an interactive analysis model that encompassed data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing data relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data was then presented in the form of a thematic narrative to facilitate understanding of the relationships between categories. The final stage of analysis involved drawing conclusions, accompanied by continuous verification throughout the research process. Data validity was maintained through the application of triangulation of sources and techniques, ensuring that the information obtained could mutually reinforce each other. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming findings with informants to ensure consistency between the data obtained and their experiences and perspectives. These steps were taken to increase the credibility and reliability of the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal four principal roles enacted by change leadership in the Cirebon Reading Grow Reading Community. First, community leaders constructed and communicated a shared literacy vision that framed reading and discussion activities as collective social goods, rather than mere programme obligations. Second, they demonstrated adaptive programme management by continuously adjusting literacy activities—topics, formats, and schedules in response to member feedback and shifting community interests. Third, they employed member empowerment strategies, actively involving participants in programme design and implementation and distributing leadership responsibilities to foster individual initiative. Fourth, community leaders managed resistance to change through open dialogue, participatory decision-making, and role modelling, thereby maintaining cohesion and commitment during periods of programmatic transition. These empirical findings are elaborated below in relation to established theoretical frameworks of change leadership.

The findings of this study indicate that the change leadership practices implemented in the Cirebon Reading, Growing, and Reading Community strongly align with established theoretical frameworks of change leadership (Bass, 2006; Fullan, 2011; J. P. Kotter, 2012). These three theoretical perspectives Fullan, (2011) theory of change leadership, Kotter, (2012) eight-step change model, and Bass, (2006) transformational leadership framework—help explain how change leadership plays a role in fostering and maintaining a spirit of literacy within the local community.

In line with Fullan's view, sustainable change is not solely determined by formal structures or policies, but is highly dependent on the leader's ability to build shared meaning and collective commitment among organizational or community members (Fullan, 2011). In the context of the Cirebon Reading, Growing, and Reading Community, community leaders act as meaning-makers, instilling a vision for literacy as a shared value, not simply an agenda of activities. Literacy is positioned as a social learning process relevant to the lives of members, so that change is not merely instructive but rather grows from the community's internal awareness. This aligns with the concept of developing shared vision in learning communities, where a participatory vision-building process strengthens both alignment and collective commitment (Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). This practice demonstrates that change leadership functions as a driver of literacy culture, not merely a manager of routine activities.

The findings of this study also align with Kotter's model of change, particularly in terms of creating a vision for change and communicating that vision on an ongoing basis (Kotter, 2012). Community leaders not only formulate the direction of the literacy movement but also communicate it through direct interaction, open dialogue, and role model engagement. This consistent communication process helps build a shared sense of urgency and reduces member resistance to changes in activity patterns or literacy strategies. Indeed, J. Kotter et al., (2021) further extended this model by emphasizing how organizations can achieve transformative results amid volatile and uncertain conditions—a dynamic that mirrors the operational reality of community-based literacy groups. Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that transformational and transactional leadership styles, when applied through Kotter's framework, can significantly sustain organizational change (Mouazen et al., 2024). Thus, the leadership for change implemented reflects an adaptive and contextual change process, even though it occurs within an informal community structure.

Furthermore, the transformational leadership perspective, as proposed by Bass, is evident in the practice of empowering community members (Bass, 2006). Community leaders do not position themselves as the center of control, but rather as facilitators, encouraging members to take initiative, be creative, and take an active role in literacy activities. This practice reflects the dimensions of inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, where members are given space to develop according to their individual potential. Wang et al., (2022) confirm that participative leadership—which shares key characteristics with the empowerment dimension of transformational leadership—enables members to develop autonomy in decision-making, which in turn increases organizational engagement. Consequently, members demonstrate higher levels of engagement and a strong sense of ownership in the sustainability of the literacy movement.

By linking the findings of this study to these three theoretical perspectives, it can be understood that change leadership in the Cirebon Reading Grow Reading Community works simultaneously on three main levels, namely the construction of meaning and a culture of literacy (Fullan, 2011), the management of communicative and adaptive change processes (J. P. Kotter, 2012), and individual transformation through empowerment and inspiration (Bass, 2006). The synergy of these three aspects explains why change leadership not only impacts the structural aspects of the community, but also contributes to the formation of a sustainable cultural dimension of literacy.

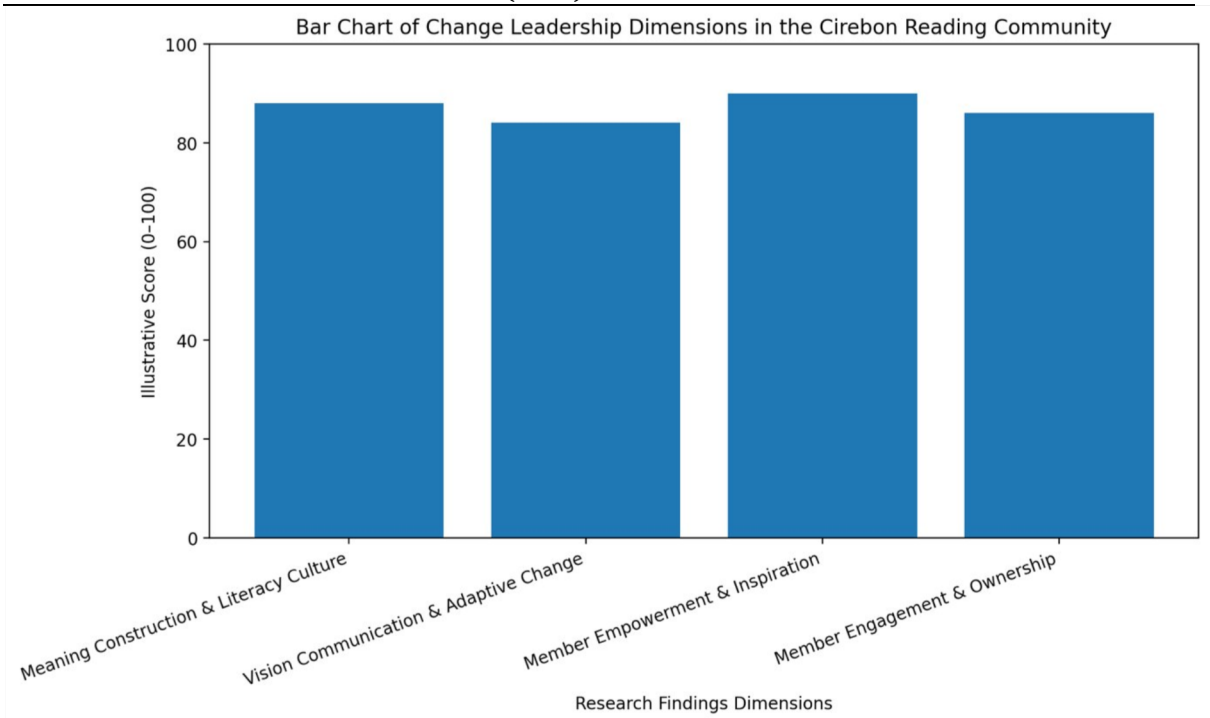

Figure 1. Bar Chart of Change Leadership Dimensions in the Cirebon Reading Community

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms four primary roles of change leadership in the Cirebon Reading Grow Reading Community constructing and communicating a shared literacy vision, managing adaptive literacy programmes responsive to member needs, empowering members as co-leaders and co-designers of literacy activities and managing resistance through open dialogue and participatory decision-making. Collectively, these roles sustained member participation, maintained programme consistency, and fostered collective literacy awareness within the community. Theoretically, the findings extend the literature on change leadership beyond formal organisational settings, demonstrating its applicability to voluntary, community-based contexts.

Practically, the results offer actionable guidance for literacy community managers, non-formal education practitioners, and policymakers seeking to design participatory, adaptive, and sustainable community literacy programmes. This study is limited by its focus on a single community and a bounded case study design. Future research is encouraged to employ comparative or mixed-methods approaches across multiple literacy communities with diverse characteristics, so as to enrich the understanding of change leadership variations and their differential impacts on literacy movement sustainability.

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