

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LITERACY IN THE CITY OF TEBING TINGGI

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Received: 11/08/2026 | Revised: 23/08/2026 | Accepted: 19/09/2026 | Published: 18/10/2026

Abstract

This research is motivated by the importance of the communication strategy of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in conveying literacy messages to high school students amidst the development of digital technology. This study aims to determine the communication strategy implemented by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in an effort to increase literacy interest in high school students and identify obstacles faced in its implementation. This study uses Harold D. Lasswell's communication model which includes the elements of communicator, message, media, target, and effect, as well as the concept of Cangara communication barriers which include technical, semantic, as well as psychological and social barriers. The research method uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation. The research informants consisted of the Head of the Service, Head of Sub-Section, Young Expert Librarians, Data Processors, and high school students. The results of the study indicate that the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service implements a communication strategy through direct and persuasive message delivery by utilizing various activities such as literacy festivals, reading competitions, book reviews, literacy seminars, mobile libraries, and digital media through POCADI and the BUNIK Tebing Tinggi application. From the aspect of communication effects, these activities received responses in the form of student attention, attendance, and participation in various literacy programs. However, the use of digital media has not been running optimally and information about these services is not yet evenly known to students. The implementation of the communication strategy also faces technical obstacles in the form of limited budget, human resources, facilities, and reading collections; semantic obstacles in the form of the need to adjust the language and form of messages to student characteristics; and psychological and social obstacles in the form of differences in student responses, environmental influences, and the tendency to use digital media for entertainment. The conclusion of the study shows that the communication strategy has been implemented through the elements of communicator, message, media, target, and effect, but still needs to be strengthened in the use of digital media, the development of messages that are appropriate to the characteristics of the target, and consistency in program implementation so that literacy communication can take place more effectively and sustainably.

Keywords: Library Service, Communication Barriers, Literacy, Communication Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesians' reading literacy has shown an increasing trend in recent years, although it remains moderate. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), published by *Statistics Indonesia*, recorded the national Reading Interest Level (TGM) at 59.52 in 2021, increasing to 63.90 in 2022, and then reaching 66.77 in 2023. This value remains within the moderate range of 50.1–75, meaning quantitative improvement does not fully demonstrate the development of a strong reading culture. This situation underscores the need for a sustainable literacy communication strategy targeting the younger generation. Students are a strategic group because literacy skills are related to the ability to understand information, think critically, and navigate the development of digital information (Ginting, 2019). Literacy conditions at the regional level show different characteristics. According to a 2025 report from the Regional Library and Archives Service, Tebing Tinggi City had a TGM of 78.30, which is considered high. Reading frequency reached 75%, while reading duration reached 85.94%. These data indicate relatively good reading habits. However, internet access frequency and duration reached 96.50% and 99.69%, respectively, so high school students' literacy

activities are increasingly influenced by the digital space. This shift demonstrates that literacy cannot be understood solely as the activity of reading books. Literacy needs to be directed at the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and utilize information critically, in accordance with the characteristics of the digital generation.

The Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service has implemented various programs to improve public literacy throughout 2025. These programs include a digital literacy workshop on June 25, a book review on June 30, a literacy content video competition on September 30, a book review competition on October 2, and a Literacy Festival on October 23–25, 2025. The implementation of these activities demonstrates institutional efforts to develop literacy through conventional and digital approaches. However, the diversity of programs cannot be used as a single indicator of the success of a communication strategy. The effectiveness of the program is determined by the institution's ability to formulate messages, select media, build interactions, and adapt the approach to the characteristics of students as the target of communication (Thariq, 2017).

Library visit data for 2025 recorded a total of 134,817 visitors. This high figure indicates that library services have a significant reach. However, visitation patterns are uneven, as mobile library services are more prevalent than in-person visits to the library building. This situation indicates that access is a factor influencing the utilization of literacy services. Some facilities, such as reading rooms and reading corners, have not been optimally utilized, resulting in a gap between the availability of facilities and their utilization levels. This phenomenon indicates that literacy issues are not only related to the provision of reading resources but are closely related to communication strategies and the institution's ability to reach its target audience effectively. (Permatasari *et al.*, 2022).

Based on 2025 membership data, 5,197 members were recorded as high school or equivalent, making up one of the largest groups in the library's membership structure. This large membership indicates that high school students already have formal access to library services. This membership cannot yet be considered evidence of sustained literacy interest, as it can be influenced by academic needs, school assignments, and scheduled activities. This situation reinforces the importance of examining the relationship between service access, program communication, and student engagement. At the high school level, literacy skills play a strategic role because they are related to the development of critical thinking skills and readiness for higher education and an increasingly information-based social environment (Hendaryan, 2022).

These issues demonstrate a gap between the intensity of literacy programs and student responses to available facilities and activities. The proliferation of social media and high internet usage has changed students' information acquisition patterns, making literacy communication through conventional approaches potentially less appealing to school-age groups. Communication strategies need to be geared toward relevant messages, appropriate media, and approaches that foster student interest and participation. Literacy encompasses more than just reading and writing skills but also the awareness to access, understand, evaluate, and use information critically. Therefore, the success of a literacy program is largely determined by the institution's ability to integrate public communication with the characteristics of the audience's needs (Ginting, 2021).

Previous research has shown that communication strategies play a crucial role in literacy development. Fani and Alamiyah (2024) found that literacy strategies for school-age students are implemented through internal, external, and digital strategies, as well as collaboration with various parties. Utami (2025) demonstrated that interpersonal and educational approaches, mobile library services, digital reading corners, seminars, and the use of social media can increase the interest of young people in literacy activities. These findings demonstrate the importance of adaptive communication strategies to changes in audience behavior. However, research specifically analyzing the communication strategies of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in increasing literacy interest among high school students is still limited, leaving room for research in this local context (Thariq and Priadi, 2025).

The urgency of this research is increasingly evident in the discrepancy between administrative achievements and the actual conditions of literacy service utilization. The number of high school students, which reached 5,197 people and the number of TGM (Tembakan Guru Nasional) of 78.30, indicates high literacy potential. However, high internet access, the dominance of mobile library services, and the less than optimal utilization of reading houses and reading corners indicate that students' connection to library services does not fully reflect an independent literacy culture. These conditions serve as the basis for assessing the effectiveness of the communication strategy implemented by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service. This research is important to determine the extent to which the communication strategy is able to bridge institutional programs with the needs and characteristics of students as the primary targets of the literacy program.

Based on these phenomena and research gaps, a study is needed on the communication strategies implemented by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service to increase high school students' literacy interest. The selection of the research location was based on the contradiction between the TGM (General Library Reading Index) which has reached 78.30 with the high intensity of internet use and the suboptimal utilization of several literacy

facilities. This condition indicates that the high reading interest indicator does not fully reflect the effectiveness of program communication and sustainable student engagement. This research is directed at analyzing the form of communication strategies, the implementation process, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in increasing student literacy interest. This study is expected to provide an empirical contribution to strengthening regional literacy policies and developing studies on public communication strategies in building a culture of student literacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Strategy

A communication strategy is a systematic plan for conveying messages to specific targets to achieve predetermined goals. In this study, a communication strategy is defined as the efforts of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in designing and implementing communication to increase literacy interest among high school students. Aspects studied include determining communication targets, developing messages, selecting media, communication methods, implementing activities, and evaluating communication. This concept is used to answer the problem formulation regarding how the Library Service implements communication strategies to increase student literacy interest (Hardiyanto, 2024) .

Literacy Interest

Literacy interest is a person's tendency to pay attention, be interested, and be involved in reading activities and the use of information. In this study, student literacy interest is defined as the interest of high school students in Tebing Tinggi City in reading activities, literacy activities, the use of library facilities, and the ability to access and understand information. This interest is seen through student interest, reading frequency, participation in literacy activities, use of library facilities, and student responses to literacy programs. This concept is a target to be improved through the Library Service's communication strategy (Putra and Adi, 2025) .

Communication Strategy Barriers

Communication strategy barriers are various factors that disrupt the message delivery process, preventing optimal communication objectives from being achieved. Communication strategy barriers are defined as factors faced by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in delivering messages and implementing literacy programs for high school students. These barriers can stem from limited human resources, facilities, budget, communication media, student characteristics, low participation, the dominance of digital media use, and limited program reach. This concept is used to address the second problem formulation regarding the barriers faced in implementing communication strategies. (Safitri, 2023) .

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach to analyze the communication strategy of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in increasing literacy interest among high school students. Research data were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation of parties involved in the implementation of the literacy program. The main informants consisted of the Head of the Service, Head of Sub-Section, librarians, and data processors who understood the implementation of the literacy program. Supporting informants came from high school students as the program targets to obtain an overview of the acceptance and response to the communication strategy implemented. The research objects included communication strategies based on the elements of communicators, messages, media, targets, and effects as well as technical, semantic, psychological, and social barriers. The study was conducted from April to August 2026 at the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service (Sugiyono, 2013) .

Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were first selected and grouped based on the categorization and focus of the research on communication strategies and barriers to their implementation. The reduced data were then presented in descriptive form to illustrate the Library Service's communication process in increasing students' literacy interest. Data validity was carried out through source triangulation and method triangulation by comparing information from the Library Service, librarians, and students with the results of observations and documentation. This triangulation was used to ensure the correspondence between the information conveyed by informants and the conditions found in the field. Next, the researcher interpreted the findings based on Lasswell's concept of communication strategies and Cangara's communication barriers (Moleong, 2017) .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Strategies Implemented by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service to Increase Literacy Interest among High School Students

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, the communication strategy of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in increasing students' literacy interest was analyzed using Harold D. Lasswell's communication model. The model includes five elements: *Who*, *Says What*, *In Which Channel*, *To Whom*, and *With What Effect*. The results of the study indicate that communication strategies cannot be assessed solely based on the number of activities implemented. The effectiveness of the strategy is determined by the suitability between the communicator, message, media, target, implementation process, and the resulting effect. Based on the research findings, mobile library and literacy activities in schools have a more direct relationship with students as targets. Meanwhile, literacy festivals, competitions, and book reviews are more appropriately positioned as supporting activities to attract students' attention to literacy (Rudianto *et al.*, 2021).

Who element in the communication strategy refers to the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service as the communicator through the head of the service, librarians, and staff involved in literacy activities. The communicator's role is to convey information about the importance of reading and build student interest in literacy activities. The results of the study indicate that the communication approach is adapted to the characteristics of high school students through the use of simpler language, a less formal atmosphere, and interactive activities. This approach demonstrates an effort to build persuasive communication so that students do not feel that literacy is a coercive activity. The communicator's position is important because the ability to build rapport with students can influence message reception. Thus, the communicator functions not only as a conveyor of information but also as a director for the formation of student interest in literacy. (Hardiyanto, 2024).

Says What element relates to the message conveyed to students. The Library Service's primary message is the importance of reading, the benefits of literacy, and an invitation to utilize various literacy resources and activities. This message is conveyed through shared reading activities, discussions, book reviews, competitions, outreach, and other literacy activities. The message is delivered using a more engaging approach so that students gain direct experience in literacy activities. The research results indicate that the message has been directed at building interest as an initial step before forming a reading habit. However, message planning still needs to be strengthened through more measurable communication objectives. Messages are not simply designed to attract attention but also need to be directed at observable behavioral changes after students participate in the activities.

In Which Channel element relates to the media or channel used to convey the message. The Library Service uses direct communication through mobile libraries, school visits, outreach, group reading, and discussions. In addition to direct communication, digital media is used through POCADI and the BUNIK Tebing Tinggi application to provide access to digital reading materials. Direct communication through mobile libraries has the advantage of enabling two-way communication between librarians and students. Staff can directly observe student responses, participation levels, and interest during the activity. Meanwhile, digital media provides easy access for students who are more familiar with the use of technology. The choice of these media indicates an effort to adapt communication channels to the characteristics of high school students (Thalib *et al.*, 2026).

To Whom element indicates that high school students are the primary target of the Library Service's communication strategy. This targeting is related to students' increasingly diverse needs for information and the development of technology in everyday life. Research results indicate that student characteristics are a consideration in determining how messages are delivered and the format of activities. Students tend to be more engaged when activities are packaged interactively and less formally. This situation requires the Library Service to use a communication approach that is appropriate to students' habits and environment. Understanding the target audience is crucial because inappropriate messages and media can reduce student attention and participation. Therefore, the communication strategy is directed not only at reaching students but also at creating forms of communication that suit their characteristics (Kanusta, 2021).

With What Effect element relates to the impact that emerges after the communication strategy is implemented. Research shows that literacy activities produce an effect in the form of increased student interest and participation in reading and other literacy activities. Students gain a more positive experience because the activities involve them not only through information delivery but also directly. However, this effect does not fully demonstrate the formation of long-term reading habits. Literacy festivals, competitions, and book reviews are *event-based*, making their effects more easily visible during the activities. This situation indicates a difference between the short-term effects of interest and the long-term effects of habit change. Therefore, follow-up activities are needed to ensure that the emerging interest can develop into sustainable literacy behavior (Permatasari, 2022).

Based on Lasswell's five elements, mobile libraries and literacy activities in schools can be considered the most powerful communication strategy for reaching high school students. This strategy has a clear relationship between the communicator, message, media, target, and effect. Librarians can interact directly with students, convey literacy messages, and observe responses during the activities. POCADI and BUNIK can strengthen this strategy by providing access to digital literacy. However, observations indicate that not all students are aware of or utilize these digital services, requiring more intensive outreach. Literacy festivals, competitions, and book reviews are more appropriately positioned as supporting activities to attract attention and create positive experiences. This division of functions is necessary so that each activity has a clear communication objective and is not judged solely on the number of activities carried out (Kusmiyati, Ginting, and Thariq, 2023) .

The research findings indicate that communication strategy planning still needs to be strengthened by establishing measurable success indicators. Planning should include determining targets, message objectives, media selection, implementation schedules, *output indicators*, *outcome indicators*, and evaluation mechanisms. The number of activities, the number of participants, and the number of schools reached are *output indicators* that demonstrate the results of program implementation. Meanwhile, increased reading frequency, utilization of library services, use of POCADI and BUNIK, and student involvement in subsequent activities are *outcome indicators* that indicate further effects. Based on research findings, measurement still focuses more on activity implementation and the number of participants. Communication strategies need to be directed at evaluating behavioral changes so that program success is not only seen from the implementation of activities. Thus, the Library Service's communication strategy needs to be developed sustainably so that student interest can develop into literacy interests and habits.

Obstacles Faced by the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service in Implementing Communication Strategies for High School Students

Based on the research results, the implementation of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service's communication strategy to increase literacy interest among high school students still faces several obstacles. This condition can be analyzed using Cangara's communication barrier theory which includes technical barriers, semantic barriers, as well as psychological and social barriers. Data on the Reading Enthusiasm Level (TGM) of Tebing Tinggi City in 2025 showed a value of 78.30, categorized as high. Reading frequency obtained a value of 75, reading duration 85.94, the number of reading materials 67.38, internet access frequency 96.50, and internet access duration 99.69. These data indicate that the community has quite good literacy potential and a high level of access to digital information. However, this high level of access does not automatically indicate that the literacy communication strategy has been able to optimally shape students' reading habits.

Technical barriers are evident in the limited availability of reading materials suited to students' characteristics and interests. Research shows that the available collections do not fully meet the needs of students, who tend to prefer light, engaging reading materials with a layout that is appropriate for their development. This situation can reduce students' interest in utilizing the available collections, even though library access is provided. In Cangara's theory, limited communication support facilities and resources are considered technical barriers because they can reduce the smooth delivery of messages to their target audience. These barriers demonstrate that communication strategies require not only engaging activities but also relevant reading materials. Therefore, collection development needs to be guided by student needs so that messages about the importance of reading can be supported by reading resources that are truly engaging and easily accessible (Hendaryan, 2022) .

Another technical barrier lies in the use of digital media such as POCADI and BUNIK Tebing Tinggi. The existence of digital media offers an opportunity to expand literacy access because students have very high levels of internet usage frequency and duration. However, research results indicate that the utilization of these media is not optimal because some students are still unaware of or uninterested in using available digital services. This situation indicates a gap between technology availability and utilization.

Psychological and social barriers are evident in the inconsistent implementation of literacy activities. Research shows that some activities are still carried out in a specific, *event-based format*, such as book review competitions, literacy festivals, reading contests, and similar activities. These activities can increase student attention and participation in the short term but do not fully guarantee the formation of sustainable reading habits. In Cangara's theory, psychological barriers can arise when message recipients experience boredom, lack interest, or lack a strong drive to follow the message. When activities are not conducted regularly, student interest can wane after the activity ends (Ginting, 2021) .

Semantic barriers relate to the way messages are conveyed to students. Research shows that high school students' characteristics require simple, interactive, and informal communication. Literacy messages delivered with an overly rigid approach or using inappropriate language can lead to students' disinterest in understanding them.

Semantic barriers, in the context of this research, relate not only to differences in linguistic meaning but also include a mismatch between the message delivery method and the recipient's characteristics. This situation suggests that the Library Service needs to continuously adapt the language, delivery method, and communication content to student characteristics. Messages about the importance of literacy will be more easily accepted if they are linked to the needs, habits, and information environments that are close to students' lives.

Other psychological and social barriers relate to budget and resource limitations in program implementation. Budgetary constraints prevent all planned activities and innovations from being implemented optimally. This situation impacts program frequency, media development, the provision of reading materials, and the ability to sustain activities. In Cangara's theory, communication success is influenced by environmental support and social conditions that enable effective communication. Limited resources can prevent designed strategies from achieving their targets. Therefore, collaboration with schools, support from relevant institutions, and prioritized resource utilization are crucial to ensure budget constraints do not hinder the achievement of literacy communication goals (Wiranti, 2021).

Based on the overall findings, the communication strategy barriers of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service can be grouped into technical, semantic, and psychological and social barriers, as explained in Cangara's theory. Technical barriers are evident in the limited availability of appropriate reading materials and the suboptimal use of digital media. Semantic barriers are evident in the need to adapt the language and format of message delivery to the characteristics of high school students. Psychological and social barriers are evident in the irregularity of activities, the potential for student boredom, and budget and resource limitations.

CONCLUSION

1. The communication strategy of the Tebing Tinggi City Public Library Service was analyzed based on Lasswell's model, which includes communicators, messages, media, targets, and effects. The strategy was implemented through literacy festivals, book reviews, mobile libraries, POCADI (Library for the Community), and BUNIK (Library for the Community). Direct communication was the dominant approach because it facilitated interaction with students. The primary target audience was high school students, with support from the school. The impact was seen in student attendance and participation in literacy activities. However, the use of digital media still needs to be strengthened to expand communication reach.
2. Communication strategy barriers were analyzed based on Cangara's concept, which encompasses technical, semantic, and psychological and social barriers. Technical barriers include limited budget, resources, facilities, reading materials, and suboptimal use of digital media. Semantic barriers relate to the need to convey messages that are simple and appropriate to students' characteristics. Psychological and social barriers are evident from environmental influences, peer influence, and the use of digital media for entertainment. Therefore, appropriate media, engaging messages, and consistent and sustainable programs are needed.

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