

# The Literacy Development: Unveiling the Role of *Balai Poestaka*: A Historical Study

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## ABSTRACT

The existence of *Balai Poestaka* was aimed to facilitate the Dutch East Indies Government in monitoring the circulation of "appropriate reading materials for the people." Therefore, on September 14, 1908, the *Commissie voor de Inlandsche School en Volkslectuur* (Commission for Native Schools and Public Reading), which eventually changed its name to *Balai Poestaka* was formed. However, the efforts made by *Balai Poestaka* had at least some impact on the development of literacy in various communities, including the Palembang Residency. This research aims to understand the initiatives undertaken by *Balai Poestaka* in advancing literacy in the Palembang Residency community. The study employs historical research methods, including heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. The study reveals that at least three efforts were made by *Balai Poestaka* to enhance community literacy. First, the establishment of *Taman Poestaka*, a library dedicated to the natives, opened in native schools under the supervision of teachers. Second, the initiation of Depot van Leermiddelen and small trucks serving as mobile bookstores reached villages in Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan. Third, at least three times a year, *Balai Poestaka* distributed 100,000 catalogs, each consisting of 32 pages, to promote its published books. Additionally, *Balai Poestaka* sold its books at affordable prices to make them accessible to the purchasing power of the community.

**Keywords:** Library role; literacy; *Balai Poestaka*; library history

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The presence of the Dutch colonial government in its colonies, in line with the definition of colonialism as the conquest of a territory belonging to another nation, involved not only territorial control but also dominion over the entire region, encompassing its economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects (Loomba, 2016). The Dutch colonial conquest extended from Southeast Asia to Australia, comprising both large and small islands collectively known

as the Dutch East Indies (Stroomberg, 2018). One of the Dutch colonial conquests was the Residency of Palembang, previously known as the Sultanate of Palembang before the Dutch colonization. The Residency of Palembang was divided into three districts: Lower Palembang, Upper Palembang, and Ogan and Komering Ulu (Hanafiah, 1998; Panji & Suriana, 2014; Sari, Syawaludin, & Khudin, 2020)

To control its colonies and achieve its desired objectives, the Dutch colonial government implemented a policy. The policy was designed as efforts or actions to influence a particular system (Anggara, 2018). One of the policies implemented by the Dutch colonial government was the *cultuurstelsel* policy, also known as the forced cultivation system or *Tanam Paksa*. Since the implementation of the *cultuurstelsel* (forced cultivation) starting in 1830, the Dutch East Indies government reaped substantial benefits. The Dutch exports surged from 13 million guilders in 1830 to 74 million guilders in 1840. Between 1840 and 1880, an average of 18 million guilders flowed into the Dutch government's treasury each year. The *cultuurstelsel* system greatly benefited the Dutch colonial government. Conversely, the indigenous people suffered significantly. This drew criticism from various quarters in the Netherlands, and one notable critique of this inhumane policy came from Multatuli (former Assistant Resident in Lebak). He expressed his condemnation through his work "Max Havelaar," first published in 1860. This book contained critiques of the forced cultivation system in Lebak, Banten (Fitri, 2022).

Since then, the *cultuurstelsel* came under attack from various quarters in the Netherlands. Humanitarian groups raised their voices passionately for the sake of humanity, while private business interests criticized the policy due to their desire to invest in the Dutch East Indies. Business groups pressed for the cessation of the *cultuurstelsel* and the adoption of liberal economic principles, allowing them to benefit from the wealth of the colonies. Their criticisms proved effective, and liberal policies began to be implemented in 1870, even though the *cultuurstelsel* persisted for a few more years.

By the end of the 19th century, thirty years after the implementation of liberal policies, the expansion of plantations and the surge in exports from the Dutch East Indies led to a decline in income per capita in the colonial territories. This downturn prompted strong criticism from Conrad Theodore van Deventer, a legal expert and member of the High Council of the Liberal Democratic Party. Deventer's protest was conveyed through his writing titled "Een Eereschuld" in the Dutch journal *de Gids* in 1899 (Aprilani & Hayari, 2018). The term "Eereschuld" essentially refers to a debt that, for the sake of honor, must be repaid, even though it cannot be legally enforced. Deventer's writing explained with concrete figures how the prosperity of the Netherlands was derived from its colonial territories in the Dutch East Indies, while those territories themselves remained poor and underdeveloped. Therefore, the Netherlands had a "moral debt" to repay by implementing a new policy prioritizing welfare programs funded by the government.

In 1901, Queen Wilhelmina announced a new political policy known as the "Ethical Policy." This policy was based on three fundamental principles: education (*edukasi*), irrigation (*irigasi*), and population resettlement (*migration*). (Ricklefs, 2007). However, after thirty years of implementing this Ethical Policy, particularly in the field of education, very few students managed to complete their education at the secondary level. The literacy rate was only slightly above six percent (6.4%) of the population. This situation was a result of uneven access to education among the entire population, which was structured based on racial and social status, such as for the European, Arab, Indian, Chinese, and indigenous population (Suwignyo, 2019). The motivation behind education during that time was primarily driven by economic interests to secure educated and cost-effective labor for employment in Dutch plantations and office positions (Saputra, 2022). Schools were segregated based on race and social status, with separate institutions for European, Arab, Indian, Chinese, and locals (Fakhriansyah & Patoni, 2019).

Despite the limited success of the Ethical Policy in the field of education, it cannot be denied that a small educated elite emerged as a result of this policy. It was this educated elite that introduced new ideas to society, marking the beginning of nationalist movements in the 20th century (Susilo & Isbandiyah, 2018). The political changes provided an opportunity for native intellectuals to establish nationalist movements. During this period of awakening, written works in newspapers, magazines, and books were already circulating in society (Fachruruzi, 2019).

According to research conducted by Agus Sulton (2015) entitled *Sastra "Bacaan Liar" Harapan Menuju Kemerdekaan*, the works produced by movement leaders at that time can be categorized as political readings. Consequently, the Dutch East Indies government began to intensify efforts to restrict writings from the nationalist movement that criticized colonial rule. To control these works, the Dutch East Indies government established a body or institution for their publication. This institution was the "Commissie voor de Inlandsche School en Volkslectuur" or Public Reading Commission (*Komisi Bacaan Rakyat*), established on September 14, 1908, based on the Regulation of the Department of Education and Religious Affairs No. 1 (Siregar, Mardanus, & Anwari, 1997). This body/institution later transformed into Balai Poestaka. Apart from the aforementioned objectives, the establishment of Balai Poestaka initially stemmed from the concern of a low-ranking official who observed that teachers and students needed reading materials to enhance their literacy skills (Pendit, 2018). Meanwhile, Fitzpatrick (2008) more specifically said that Balai Poestaka was an instrument of colonialism and a symbol for the 'cultivation' of colonial people through reading and literacy.

*Balai Poestaka* according to research conducted by Sulistya Putri, Dewi Yuliati, Dhanang Respati Puguh entitled *"Kebijakan Balai Poestaka sebagai Pemerintah Kolonial Belanda Badan Penerbitan pada tahun 1917-1942"* (Balai Poestaka Policy as the Dutch Colonial Government Publishing Agency in 1917-1942) functioned as a censorship agency for literary works in ensuring the social and political stability of the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies (Putri, Yuliati, & Respati Puguh, 2021). Another study entitled *"Sejarah Penerbitan Buku Sampai Terbentuknya Balai Poestaka pada Masa Pergerakan Nasional Indonesia"* (History of Book Publishing until the Establishment of *Balai Poestaka* during the Indonesian National Movement) revealed that before the establishment of *Balai Poestaka* as the Dutch official publishing, there were already publishers and printing presses owned or run by Peranakan Chinese and Indo-Europeans in Java. (Andriyanto, 2022). Seeing the interesting development of literacy during that time, this study aims to reveal whether the existence of Balai Poestaka had a role in developing literacy in the Palembang Residency community.

## 2. METHODS

This research employs a historical research method. The historical method is aimed to reconstruct past human experiences. The steps involved include heuristic, verification, interpretation, and historiography (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018). The data sources utilized in this study comprise primary and secondary sources. Historical sources can be categorized as primary sources when the source personally witnesses, hears or experiences the events documented in the source. Historical sources can also be classified as primary if the source has not been processed or altered in any way, and its content remains untouched (Herlina, 2020). According to Tjandrasmita, the use of manuscripts as historical sources can be done in two ways. First, historians can directly access the original manuscripts. Second, they can access manuscripts that have been studied by philologists (Uka Tjandrasmita, 2011). This research utilizes both approaches.

The primary sources utilized in this research consist of written materials, specifically newspapers published in Palembang between 1901 and 1956. These primary sources are available at the National Library of Republic of Indonesia (PNRI), such as *Teradjoe* (1919), *Tjahaja Palembang* (1925), *Pewarta* (1934), *Soewara* (1936). The newspapers from the collection

of the PNRI have been converted into microfilm. Meanwhile, secondary sources for this research include books about Balai Poestaka.

The data analysis technique begins with the collection of sources (heuristic) by reading bibliographies in previous studies that discuss the same topic. This is followed by tracing the existence of these historical sources. Additionally, searches are conducted through literary artifacts produced during the Dutch East Indies colonial period, such as newspapers. The collection of newspaper sources is carried out by interviewing the librarians in the rare newspaper service on the 8th floor of the National Library of Indonesia (PNRI). This led to the identification of a list of microfilm newspapers and magazines published during the Dutch East Indies period. From this list, 22 newspapers published in Palembang were identified, with 7 in Dutch and 15 in Indonesian. Subsequently, the research involved reading the 15 newspapers in Indonesian. The search for secondary sources was conducted through the PNRI catalog. (<https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/>).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Balai Poestaka* was established by the Dutch East Indies government because the *Komisi Bacaan Rakyat* (Public Reading Commission), formed by the government in 1908, was considered successful in fulfilling its duties. The increasing number of publications necessitated more human resources. Therefore, the Dutch government deemed it necessary to develop this institution into a separate entity with a new name. Based on this notion, the government issued Act No. 63 on September 22, 1917, regarding the establishment of the *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur*. This institution was later named *Balai Poestaka* and was led by Douwe Adolf Rinkes.

According to Andries Hans Teeuw, also known as A. Teeuw (1921-2012), a Dutch expert in Indonesian literature and culture, initially, the main purpose of Balai Poestaka was to collect and publish abundant traditional folk literature found in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, the bureau encouraged the creation of original modern works by Indonesian authors, provided translations, and promoted a variety of Western literary works (Redaksi, 2014).

According to Teeuw's study, the publications of Balai Poestaka during the Dutch East Indies era can be categorized into three types: publications on traditional folk literature, translated works from Western literature, and original works by Indonesian authors. Through the research conducted, publications from Balai Poestaka that fall under traditional folk literature include as follows.

**Table 1.** Traditional folk literatures publications by Balai Poestaka

No	Title	Publication Year
1	Hikayat Hang Tuah	1924
2	Hikajat tjerita maharadja Rawana	
3	Inhoud van de Hikayat Hamzah	
4	Hikajat Pelandoek Djinaka	1934
5	Hikajat Pandji Semirang (salinan dari kitab asalnja jang tersimpan di Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia)	1953

**Table 2.** Translations of Western folk literatures

No	Title	Author	Translator	Publication Year
1	Tom Sawyer anak Amerika	Mark Twain	Abdoel Moeis	1928

2	Anak radja dan anak miskin	Mark Twain	B. Dj Rasad	1922
3	Parawan di djalan sepi	Arthur Conan Doyle	R. Bratakoesoema	1930

Besides having local folk literatures, *Balai Poestaka* also produced translations of Western literature translated into the Malay language. These books have been digitized by the National Library in form of electronic sources, CD-ROMs. The book can be accessed at the National Library at the South Merdeka street on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, and it is available for reading only at that location.

The next translation of Arthur Conan Doyle's work, *Parawan di djalan sepi* (Virgin on a quiet street) translated into Sundanese by R. Bratakoesoema Weltevreden in 1930. The book can also be accessed at the National Library at the South Merdeka street on the 8th floor.

**Table 3.** Original works by Indonesian authors

No	Titles	Author	Publication Year
1	Azab dan Sengsara	Merari Siregar	1920
2	Binasa kerna Gadis Priangan	Merari Siregar	1931
3	Cinta dan Hawa Nafsu	Merari Siregar	
4	Sitti Nurbaya	Marah Roesli	1922
5	La Hami	Marah Roesli	1924
6	Anak dan Kemenakan	Marah Roesli	1956
7	Tanah Air	Muhammad Yamin	1922
8	Indonesia, Tumpah Darahku	Muhammad Yamin	1928
9	Kalau Dewi Tara Sudah Berkata	Muhammad Yamin	
10	Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes	Muhammad Yamin	1934
11	Apa Dayaku karena Aku Seorang Perempuan	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1923
12	Cinta yang Membawa Maut	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1926
13	Salah Pilih	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1928
14	Karena Mentua	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1932
15	Tuba Dibalas dengan Susu	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1933
16	Hulubalang Raja	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1934
17	Katak Hendak Menjadi Lembu	Nur Sutan Iskandar	1935
18	Tak Disangka	Tulis Sutan Sati	1923
19	Sengsara Membawa Nikmat	Tulis Sutan Sati	1928
20	Tak Membalas Guna	Tulis Sutan Sati	1932
21	Memutuskan Pertalian	Tulis Sutan Sati	1932
22	Darah Muda	Djamaluddin Adinegoro	1927
23	Asmara Jaya	Djamaluddin Adinegoro	1928
24	Pertemuan	Abas Sutan Pamuntjak & Nan Sati	1927
25	Salah Asuhan	Abdul Muis	1928
26	Pertemuan Djodoh	Abdul Muis	1933
27	Menebus Dosa	Aman Datuk Madjoindo	1932
28	Si Cebol Rindukan Bulan	Aman Datuk Madjoindo	1934
29	Sampaikan Salamku Kepadanya	Aman Datuk Madjoindo	1935

Through this publisher, modern original works by Indonesian authors were also born, known as modern Indonesian novels. The first modern Indonesian novel was *Azab dan*

*Sengsara* (Torment and Suffer) by Merari Siregar in 1920. This work marks the beginning of Modern Indonesian literature, known as the '*Angkatan 20*' or more famously as the '*Angkatan Balai Poestaka*.' The books published by *Balai Poestaka* covered a variety of topics and languages. In addition to educational books and folk tales, Balai Poestaka also published various books on health, agriculture, technology, arts, and skills. The publications of Balai Poestaka were issued in Malay and various regional languages. Based on the second catalog of *Balai Poestaka* (1917), in its first year of establishment, *Balai Poestaka* had published books in Malay (31) and Javanese, with Latin and Arabic scripts (101), Sundanese (67), Madurese (22), Batak (4), Acehnese (1), Bugis (1), and Makassarese (1) (Siregar et al., 1997).

During the Dutch East Indies government era, Balai Poestaka also endeavored to promote the development of the indigenous culture. This effort is evident in the large number of books in regional languages and books about regional cultures published throughout the years. K. A. H. Hidding, as the last chief of *Balai Poestaka* before the Japanese occupation, emphasized by stating that:

*Balai Poestaka made efforts to stimulate the cultural development of the indigenous people and enhance their education. This was done not only through new discoveries but also by preserving everything that held meaning for the indigenous culture. If deemed necessary, anything meaningful was given a new lease of life. For Balai Poestaka, culture was not something isolated; because culture is always linked to the past and the future. In this context, Balai Poestaka collected and reprinted the ancient literature, which was a cultural heritage of certain communities* (Siregar, Mardanus, & Anwari, 1997).

One effort to stimulate the development of indigenous culture is to publish books about culture so that they can be read by every generation. Like a book *Tatatjara* by Ki Padmasoesastra written in Bahasa and Java, published by *Balai Poestaka* in 1914, describing the Javanese customs and traditions. Initially, the intentions of the Dutch East Indies government were viewed with suspicion by the public. However, as indigenous intellectuals started writing for Balai Poestaka, the suspicions gradually faded away. During that time, *Balai Poestaka* not only published books but also released periodic magazines such as the monthly magazine *Sri Poestaka*, first published in 1918. This illustrated magazine initially contained social and technical knowledge, and later its scope expanded to attract a broader readership. Subsequently, it featured popular scientific articles, literature, and ethnography. Serial stories published in the magazine were often republished as books.

Then, in 1923, the weekly magazine *Majalah Pandji Poestaka* was launched. This magazine featured articles on various current issues with various illustrations. Through this medium, news from around the world were informed. The public obtained various information about farming, education, sports, commentary on developments both abroad and domestically, and various new regulations and decrees issued by the government. Additionally, detailed reports on sessions of the *Majelis Rendah* or *Volksraad* (Lower House) were frequently presented so that the public knows why and how regulations are implemented. In the field of literature, *Majalah Pandji Poestaka* opened a special section titled *Menoejoe Kesoesteriaan Baroe* (Towards New Literature), focusing on articles about the development of literature in the Dutch East Indies. This magazine also presented reports on the market and serialized stories. With its rich content, the readership of this magazine quickly increased, leading to its publication twice a week in 1926. By 1941, the circulation of this magazine had reached 7,000 copies, a substantial number at that time.

The next weekly magazine that was published in 1923 is *Kedjawen* (a magazine in Javanese), also published twice a week since 1928. In 1924, the weekly magazine in Sundanese, *Parahiangan*, was also published. The content of both magazines was tailored to the taste and

intellectual development of each community group that constituted the target audience for these magazines. In 1941, the circulation of *Kedjawen* reached 5000 copies, while *Parahiangan* only reached 2500 copies

## DISCUSSION

Balai Poestaka was the first publishing institution of the Dutch East Indies government that had the privilege of a monopoly in the publishing and printing industry. Additionally, Balai Poestaka also served as a censorship institution for literary works to ensure the social and political stability of the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies. The works of writers at that time were considered a threat to the Dutch East Indies government. This indicates that literacy activities resulting in written works played a role in a social context. The Dutch East Indies government perceived it as a threat to the sustainability of Dutch colonial rule. This aligns with the opinion of Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic (2000) that literacy can be considered power or threat by certain social groups.

Initially, this commission only published light readings with the hope that these readings could stimulate and maintain reading interest. Folk stories, epics, and fairy tales began to be published by this commission with attractive illustrations. Later on, translations and adaptations of novels in Dutch, English, French, German, and some books in Arabic were also published. The abundance of books in regional languages reflects how earnestly the *Komisi Bacaan Rakyat* (Public Reading Commission) and *Balai Poestaka* participated in the cultural development process, aiming to direct public attention to Balai Poestaka's publications. Additionally, the effort to publish books about culture also played a role in developing literacy among the public at that time. Despite the considerable number of published books, *Balai Poestaka* did not face difficulties in marketing its products. With the existence of *Taman Poestaka*, books and magazines were easily accessible.

The establishment of *Taman Poestaka* by *Balai Poestaka* is related to post-production policies involving the distribution of manuscripts, based on Act No. 5 dated October 13, 1910 (Siregar, Mardanus, & Anwari, 1997). *Taman Poestaka* is a library dedicated to indigenous people and opened in native schools under the supervision of school teachers. In the Residency of Palembang, according to the calculations of Mr. Inspecteur C. Lekkerkerker, the number of government schools in 1916 was 1 HIS (146 male and 3 female students), 31 Sekolah Kl.2 (4030 male and 103 female students), 99 *Volkschool* or *Sekolah Rakyat* (public schools) (6878 male and 107 female students), 1 *Zendings scholen* (115 male and 1 female student) (Nawawi, 1919).

The Dutch East Indies government established schools for the indigenous people called *Volkschool* (public school), which admitted graduates of *Sekolah Rendah Angka Dua* (elementary school grade two). The library in *Volkschool* was called *Volksbibliotheek* or *Taman Poestaka*, with a collection sourced from *Volkslectuur* (Balai Poestaka). *Volksbibliotheek* or *Taman Poestaka* not only served reading materials for teachers and students in the school but also the surrounding community. Students and teachers were not charged, while the surrounding community paid 2.5 cents for two books borrowed for two weeks. Each *Volksbibliotheek* received book assistance from the government based on their respective ethnic environments. For example, for *Volksbibliotheek Java*, the Dutch East Indies government provided 417 titles in Javanese and 282 titles in Malay. For *Volksbibliotheek Sunda*, the Dutch East Indies government provided 291 titles in Sundanese and 282 titles in Malay. For *Volksbibliotheek Madura*, 67 titles in Madurese and 282 titles in Malay were provided. For *Volksbibliotheek Melayu*, each school library received 328 titles in Malay. The total number of school libraries or *Volksbibliotheek* in Sumatra in 1937 was 359 (Sulistyo-Basuki, 2016).

The distribution of books published by Balai Poestaka was not only limited to school libraries but also involved sales managed by the Depot van Leermiddelen and small trucks functioning as mobile bookstores reaching villages in Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan.



**Figure 1.** Mobile library in Sumatera

Source: *Buku Delapan Puluh Tahun Balai Poestaka Menjelajah Nusantara* (Jakarta: Balai Poestaka, 1997)

In marketing its books, *Balai Poestaka* awares of the importance of advertising. Some newspapers and magazines contained advertisements. Additionally, at least three times a year, *Balai Poestaka* circulated 100,000 catalogs, each with a thickness of 32 pages. The catalogs attracted parties and they could learn about the books published by *Balai Poestaka*. *Balai Poestaka* sold its books at affordable prices to cater to the purchasing power of the public. The book prices were printed on the covers to prevent resale at higher prices, a step taken because, before prices were listed on the covers, private publishers who bought books from *Balai Poestaka* often resold them at higher prices.

Another important part of *Balai Poestaka*, besides its published books and the libraries, was the Pers Section. This section published summaries of various articles from various Malay-language newspapers every week for the benefit of government officials and the public through subscriptions. Additionally, the Pers Section published monthly reviews of Malay-language newspapers, but these reviews were specifically issued for the Governor-General and government officials. The Pers Section also monitored Dutch-language newspapers that write about the indigenous people and selected news to be broadcast by *Pandji Poestaka* and the two regional-language magazines, *Kedjawen* and *Parahiangan*. The Pers Section also translated complete articles from Malay-language newspapers, leaflets, and advertisements for publication in Malay-language newspapers.

After twenty years of the existence of the library which was named *Taman Poestaka*, in 1930 there were already 2,528 points with the number of books borrowed reaching 2.7 million (Kilas Sejarah, 2023). In addition, *Balai Poestaka's* sales agent network spread across various major cities. In the Palembang Residency, Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh's store in 16 Ilir served as a sales agent for *Balai Poestaka's* books (Toko Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh, 1925).





**Figure 2.** Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh' store  
Source: Newspaper microfilm of *Thahaja Palembang* (November 30, 1925), (PNRI collection)

The store of Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh marketed books to the community through advertisements in local newspapers circulating in South Sumatra. Several book sales advertisements were found in newspapers such as *Tjahaja Palembang*, published on November 16, 24, and 30, 1925, as well as on December 24, 1925 (Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh, 1925), March 25, 1926; April 1, 16, and 29, 1926; and , May 20, 1926. (Tokoe Boekoe Raden Hasan bin Raden H. Saleh, 1926). In the rural areas without bookstores, *Balai Poestaka* appointed 250 post offices as unofficial agents. Catalogs were available in glass cabinets placed in all post offices to showcase *Balai Poestaka's* publications. Services were also provided free of charge; anyone who wanted to order books and magazines simply had to write down the titles and hand them over to the post office staff. No delivery charges were imposed for these orders.

The abundance of works published by *Balai Poestaka* spurred the community to participate in developing literacy. From the research conducted, in the Palembang City in 1934, there were already a place offering book rental.



**Figure 3.** Bibliothek Ketjerdasan  
Source: Newspaper microfilm *Pewarta* (Palembang, September 1, 1934) (PNRI Collection)

This book rental in Palembang City was named *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan*, opened on September 1, 1934 while located next to Bandoeng's store, 16 Ilir Palembang (Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan, 1934). The rented books varied, covering topics such as religion, politics, labor movements, history, economics, biography, language, law and regulations, health, education, women's issues, trade books, romance stories, and more. To find out about each book and its borrowing rules, readers were welcome to visit the library in person. The book rental service was promoted through advertisements in *Pewarta*, one of the two newspapers published in Palembang at that time. Advertising through newspapers was undoubtedly the primary means of promotion during that period.



**Figure 4.** Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan  
Source: newspaper microfilm *Pewarta* (Palembang, November 3, 1934)  
(PNRI Collection)

In this advertisement, this book rental was not open every day but only three times a week, namely Sunday, Wednesday and Friday (Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan, 1934). Data on the rental fees for books at this book rental place were not found. The book rental service continued, and in 1936, another advertisement was found in a different newspaper, namely *Soeara*, as *Pewarta* newspaper's last publication was in 1935.



**Figure 5.** Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan  
Sumber : Newspaper microfilm *Soeara* (Palembang, March 1936)  
(PNRI Collection)

In this advertisement stated that book rentals were available. *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan* (De Ontwikkeling) initially located at 16 Ilir, in 1936 it moved to 13 Ilir Palembang (Bibliotheek

Ketjerdasan, 1936). *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan* was the only complete rental library in Palembang at that time. This library played a crucial role in meeting the reading needs of the community. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, precisely in 1934, *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan* was opened in the Palembang City. This indicates a significant concern for literacy from the community. Until 1936, the *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan* continued to promote its existence. Books and magazines published by *Balai Poestaka* served as a reference for the people of the Palembang Residency. This shows that *Balai Poestaka* played a role in increasing the reading interest of the people of the Palembang Residency.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study conclude that *Balai Poestaka* made several efforts to promote literacy in the community. First, they established *Taman Poestaka*, a library specifically for indigenous people, opened in native schools under the supervision of school teachers. Second, they opened the "Depot van Leermiddelen" and small trucks as mobile bookstores, reaching villages in Java, Sumatera, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan. Third, at least three times a year, *Balai Poestaka* distributed 100,000 catalogs, each 32 pages thick, to promote their published books. In addition, *Balai Poestaka* sold its books at affordable prices to the public. Book prices were printed on the covers to prevent resale at higher prices. The extensive publication of books reflects the serious involvement of the *Komisi Bacaan Rakyat* (Public Reading Commission) or *Balai Poestaka* in the development of community literacy. In the Palembang Residency, the sale of *Balai Poestaka's* books was handled by the Raden Hasan bin Raden M. Saleh's store, which advertised books in local newspapers circulating in South Sumatra. Furthermore, in Palembang, in 1934, there was also a book rental named *Bibliotheek Ketjerdasan*.

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